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QUEER EMPLOTMENT: LESBIAN CARETAKING IN NORTH AMERICAN
CANONICAL FICTION FROM 1980 – 2011.

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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No one writes alone. We sit at our desks, aching to get it just right, feeling as if the torture will never end and thinking perhaps the best thing might be to throw our laptop out the window. I often imagined as I wrote this dissertation that *no one in all the land* could feel as awful as I did. It took brownies, margaritas, potato chips, and chocolate. It took crying and shouting and laughing. And it took all of you, rooting me on, pushing me to finish every last sentence. I sat at my desk and I wrote alone, but I was not alone.

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation argues that lesbian caretaking in late 20th century and early 21th century North American fiction disrupts normative temporalities while repairing damage protagonists sustain from intra-familial trauma. Aligned with queer studies' growing interest in representations of time, my project explores this paradox of lesbian representation. How can lesbian characters be both reparative and disruptive? Lesbian characters in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1980); Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992); and Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag* (2010) are reparative as they clean up the psychological and physical damage caused male violence, sexual abuse, and neglectful mothers. Yet their caregiving disrupts what queer theorists refer to as 'straight time.' Functioning to ensure maximum productivity for the state, straight time requires a linear model of time, dependent on heterosexual reproduction. Mothering is central to the reproduction of straight time, as through their discipline, mothers ensure children adhere to linear temporality. Because lesbian characters are queer, they exist outside of this normative timeframe, but as careworkers they are implicated in this normative discipling. In other words, the behavioral expectation of women – caring – thrusts lesbian characters into a narrative space where they are neither completely assimilated into heterosexual families nor completely excluded from them. In fact, heterosexual families in these texts depend upon lesbian caretaking to function. Yet, despite this connection to heteronormativity, lesbian characters do not perform straight care. Nor do they offer protagonists a queer alternative to straight time. Instead, in these three texts, lesbians provide a kind of queer care that offers knowledge about the discipline that maintains the

boundary between straight time and queer temporality. I am currently developing my dissertation into a book manuscript titled *Magical Queers in Troubled Times: Lesbian Carework in Fiction, Film, and Television*, which expands my archive to include representation of lesbian carework in mass mediated genres.

My research contributes to cultural studies, positing links between queer feminist literary studies, gender studies, and sociological feminist carework studies. This project intervenes in existing theories of queer temporality by arguing that the gendered expectation that women will do most of the caretaking in families must be considered. While some queer theorists look towards an ideal queer futurity that is separated from heteronormative, reproductive futurity, I show in my research that feminized caring norms moor queer women to reproductive futurity.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: MAGICAL LESBIANS, LEZ-BEING, AND TEMPORALITY

Introduction

I began this project with, as Gloria Anzaldúa might say, a cactus needle embedded under my flesh (73). Anzaldúa says it is the irritation from the needle that drives us to write, and as I read for my exams, I found myself irritated by a pattern in late 20th and 21st century North American fiction. It was the lesbians. Not books with lesbian protagonists, but the ones with secondary lesbians. Gone were the mad, frightening, depressing, and sometimes powerful spinsters who complicated Victorian and Modernist fiction. These openly lesbian secondary characters cooked. They cleaned. They took care of children. When men were abusing women, they were there. At the same time, I noticed a pattern in my Facebook feed. Women, both queer and straight, all of them already in relationships, were talking about wanting wives. I could not stop thinking about secondary lesbians in novels and Facebook status about wives for women. I did not like seeing secondary lesbians in literature picking up the messes of heteropatriarchy, or women in my Facebook feed asking for someone outside of their relationships to materialize in order to pick up the messes and do emotional labor.

I realized I had seen minor characters sacrificing themselves plenty before, in the Magic Negro trope, when minor, poor or working class Black characters in film and fiction solve problems for white protagonists.¹ These secondary women who all shared a sexual

¹ Mid-twentieth century magic Negroes include films from the 1950's, such Sidney Poitier's role in "The Defiant Ones," in which Poitier's character offers himself in exchange for the white male lead's salvation (Glenn & Cunningham 137).

interest in other women were Magical Lesbians. I name these characters Magical Lesbians not to argue that lesbian caregiving work is like magic Negro narrative work; instead I use my term as a way to recognize that 20th and 21st century North American narrative systems marginalize characters based on race and sexuality. In contemporary North American novels, Magical Lesbians were saving the day - appearing when wives and children were battered, performing feminized, raced, and classed caretaking for other women. They were Black, White, Latina, Native American, and biracial. Sometimes they were rich and sometimes they were poor, but no matter what, Magical Lesbians got a raw deal. They were the wives my Facebook friends longed for: they appeared when life became unbearable and asked for nothing in return. In fact, the role these Magical Lesbians played in novels - performing feminized caring labor - seemed to be what real life women fantasized about. I will admit that I started this project planning on an indictment. Of whom or what, I did not know, but I wanted this exploitation of secondary lesbian characters to stop.

I have come a long way from that place. When I paid closer attention to Magical Lesbians, I saw that they were doing much more than being fantasy wives. They had their own desires and needs, even if those needs ended up being met by caring for other people. And they were dissatisfied with their lot in novels. Their resistance came through with their body language and the rare times they spoke about their desires. I stepped back from my initial assumptions asked: why were these secondary characters lesbians? Why couldn't they just be female friends and relatives? After doing this research, I realized that Magical Lesbians openly show erotic attraction to other women in novels because queerness, that is sexuality outside of heterosexual norms, allows them to have different relationship to time.

Magical Lesbians were doing the tasks of feminized carework for abused protagonists - the cooking, cleaning, childcare, and comforting -- but they also were doing a form of time-work.

In the novels I read, women in heterosexual marriages, as well as their children, were trapped in present moments they could not escape from. They both longed for different futures and for connections to their pasts, but heteropatriarchal abuse kept them stuck in survival mode. Queer theorist, Jack Halberstam, whose work I deeply respect and whose thinking on queer failure was so useful as I began this project, argues that forgetting is a queer act of resisting normative linear temporality, but in the three texts I studied for this project, (1980); Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992); and Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag* (2010), married women were the ones who had to forget male abuse in order to survive. Magical Lesbians demonstrated queer resistance to linear temporality by providing a space for remembering abuse. My interest in the relationship between forgetting and abuse is not solely academic; I have worked on two hotlines for battered women and both my trainings emphasized the role forgetting played in abusive relationships. My job, as a voice on the other end of a hotline, was to provide a place where women could remember abuse. Magical Lesbians provide archival work in novel: they hold memories for entire extended families as well as provide a space for abused women to remember. This narrative work is remarkably similar to the actual work women's shelters and hotlines do in helping women remember abuse in order to escape it.

In these texts I focus on in this project, the secondary lesbians are not, as Halberstam suggests, queerly forgetting, in order to shift temporality, but instead, Magical Lesbians act as both archive and archivists in these texts, and in doing so, along with their

feminized caring, they disrupt existing theories of temporality. To further understand how Magical Lesbians trouble temporality, I look to anthropological studies of non-linear time in non-western cultures and queer temporality. In particular I explore "straight time" which José Esteban Muñoz argues "Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life" and indeed, this is the very conception of time that Magical Lesbians promote, as they open up possible routes of escape for abused women ("Utopia" 22). Chrono-normativity, which Elizabeth Freeman explains is the institutionalized forces that make straight time seem as it is the only natural and logical way to think about time, is why straight time is so difficult to move past, and perhaps why queer characters envision ways out of abuse for heterosexual women (3). For Freeman, the mechanisms through which we understand and mark time— birthdays, wedding anniversaries, clocks— construct an experience of time which seems natural and is tied into heterosexuality. Furthermore, linear, normative, straight time is connected with capitalist modes of production -- could we imagine a factory without a clock? -- the nuclear family, and as Bakhtin points out, the novel structure (231). Theories of queer temporality look to non-linear models of time, as they point out that by breaking off from biological heterosexual reproduction, lesbians, gays, and trans* folks move into non-normative, non-linear temporality. Some models of queer temporality, such as Muñoz's, look to queer futurity as an alternative to straight time. Instead of a linear biological progression of genetic material through time, Muñoz's queer futurity focuses on potentiality as he explains: "We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain,"(1). Lee Edelman, a proponent of the potentiality of the pleasure of the present moment, argues for a queer

temporality that is completely separate from the image of the child. Edelman's polemic is problematic for a number of reasons, however, by insisting that the child is the symbol of reproductive futurity, he creates a false binary between queer temporality and reproductive futurity.²

I argue that Magical Lesbian characters demonstrate that queer temporality and reproductive futurity are already linked through the feminine caring labor. In both *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *Shadow Tag*, it is lesbian aunts who provide children from living in abusive heterosexual marriages with futures. But it is not just childcare that troubles queer temporality - feminized caring labor, or carework, which sociologist Celia Davies describes as "attending physically, mentally, and emotionally to the needs of another and giving a commitment to the nurturance, growth and healing of that other" inherently troubles queer temporality and chrono-normativity (18-19). Carework is problematic for chrono-normativity and straight time because it is non-linear and necessary. The laundry that was washed yesterday will be dirty again tomorrow. The food we prepare is consumed each meal. Carework is cyclical. As feminist carework scholars point out, many economists and sociologists simply ignore this labor because it is performed in the home and seen to be a "natural" and altruistic part of femininity. But I think carework gets ignored for more reasons than that. For sociologists and economists, carework poses an epistemological threat. It troubles quantitative measurement. Is doing laundry from 2:00 pm - 3:30 pm

² As Jacqui Allen points out in his essay "Black/Queer/Diaspora," "[p]art of the disappointment in/of some streams of queer theory is that having accepted the postmodern (PoMo) understanding of the collapse of the categories of experience melting into nothingness, there is little room for anything -- "no future" indeed -- beyond a yawning pessimism, which queers of color have, time after time insisted our communities cannot afford" (222).

while cooking, while watching children, and comforting a friend one and half hours of carework? Is that the same amount of carework as doing a load of laundry for one and half hours while watching television? How does one structure variables to even account for how those two scenarios differ?

I bring up these methodological issues from the social sciences to point how carework already troubles linear measurement and temporality. In terms of queer temporality, carework is all but ignored by a handful of theorists. Perhaps this is because carework disturbs the neat split queer theorists claim exist between reproductive futurity and queer futurity. Whether it is in Muñoz's utopian queer future or Edelman's anti-social queer present, someone needs to do the cooking and cleaning. The repetition of Magical Lesbians performing carework in literature suggests that reproductive futurity has already been queered through lesbian caring, as lesbians, because they are women, are subject to feminized caring expectations. Queer futurity itself is destabilized when lesbian caring labor is taken into account.

Lesbian caring suggests that the boundaries between queer futurity and reproductive futurity are murky and slippery, and that by creating a clearly defined boundary between straight time and queer time, as so many queer theorists have done, they actually reinforce the very teleological models of subject formation queer theorists are striving to do away with. Furthermore, contemporary queer temporality theories scapegoat mothers - both queer and straight - as reproducing heteronormative oppression and temporality. I think this is simply not the case, as the Magical Lesbian demonstrates that looking at mothering as praxis, rather than as an identity, shows us that mothering can be a kind of time-work that can heal the damages caused by heteropatriarchal abuse. I offer

my theory of the Magical Lesbian as a means to explore the ways queer futurity and reproductive futurity are connected through feminine caring labor.

In this project, I focus on North America as I explore the dialogue and tensions arising from specific locales -- Black, White, Native American, rural poor, and middle-class suburban -- within one nation. In this project, I show that contemporary representations of lesbian caregiving portray a reproductive futurity that is not as straight as Edelman suggests. There is a temporal aspect to lesbian caregiving, which has much to teach us about the discipline that maintains the binary between queer temporality and reproductive futurism. When I mention the characters I study, colleagues who have read Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* might remember Aunt Raylene but they have forgotten the paragraph where she confesses to the protagonist that her true love is a woman. Including lesbians as secondary characters but not primary characters works as a narrative sleight of hand. Those of us looking for lesbians see them, while their limited space in the text acts as closet for those who prefer not to see them.

The three texts I use in this study all contain lesbian carework done by secondary characters. I read Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1980); Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992); and Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag* (2011) as telling a particular story about lesbian caring moments. In all three, it is secondary lesbians who rescue women protagonists from abusive men through feminized caring labor. One reason I focus on secondary characters is that when lesbians are not in the center of narratives, their relationship to history shifts. Instead of being ahistorical, as Judith Roof argues, secondary lesbian characters become archival ("Not For You" 168). They hold family memories. They reconnect protagonists to the past. They challenge existing theories about queer

temporality. These three novels, read together, show Magical Lesbian characters challenging theories of queer temporality as about an erasure of the past. Halberstam argues in that gender needs to be taken into account in constructing theories of queer temporality (15). However, he looks at forgetting as a queer temporality that "can be a useful tool for jamming the smooth operations of the normal and the ordinary" ("Failure" 70). Halberstam further argues that forgetting for women and queer people provides "an opportunity for a non-hetero-reproductive future" ("Failure" 70). Yet the secondary characters in the three novels in this study suggest the opposite, as when looked at in the context of male abuse, forgetting is key to reproductive futurity, heteronormativity, and as Muñoz would say, "straight time." It is the women in abusive heterosexual marriage who forget abuse, family connections, and ethnic histories. Magical Lesbians provide a (re)membering for protagonists based in family history and acknowledgement of male abuse. The contemporary Magical Lesbian's power in novel plots echoes the power attributed to early twentieth century anti-lesbian novels in which "the lesbian is obsessed with a need to control a human life and lead it to destruction" (Faderman, "Surpassing" 341). While contemporary magic Lesbians do not destroy women they are powerful in narratives and their presence has a destructive element when it comes to male power over women. Often severing fathers' power over their daughters, Magic Lesbians intervene in patriarchal power structures. For example, Shug from Walker's *The Color Purple* prevents Celie's husband from beating and raping her and provides the temporal space for Celie to heal from the childhood psychological damage Celie's stepfather inflicted upon her. In Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Aunt Raylene removes Bone from her abusive stepfather, and protects her from being re-traumatized by a public investigation of her rape. In

Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*, May provides a safe, non-abusive home for the protagonists' three children.

Furthermore, Magical Lesbian caretaking in these three texts constitutes a queer futurity that resolves an issue in both Muñoz's "not yet here" queer utopia and in Edelman's antisocial futurity. Both Muñoz and Edelman solve the problem of Althusser's teleological subject formation by suggesting a clear split between reproductive (teleological) futurity and queer futurity.³ While both Muñoz and Edelman focus on potentiality -- for example, Muñoz writes queerness is "like a crashing wave of potentiality. And we must give in to its propulsion, its status as a destination" (Utopia 185) – they are borrowing the movement of teleology even if they are separating themselves from the result. In other words, a queer futurity that is split from reproductive futurity does not escape teleology. Carework, however, is non-teleological as it is never finished. There is no destination in caring, no possibility that the laundry and cooking will not need to be done again tomorrow. What the Magical Lesbian does is show us that queer futurity can exist side by side with reproductive futurity without buying into Althusser's teleology. The Magical Lesbian helps us think these time frames together as she troubles time. Not only does she emerge in text during time of trouble for other characters, her very presence troubles notions of both queer and linear temporality.

While queerness is that which is found outside normative constructs, for this project I choose to study Magical Lesbians who were troubling time in the midst of contemporary

³ Althusser claims, "individuals are always already subjects" (np). He argues that ideology interpellates subjects even before they are born. Once subjects achieve self-recognition, the process is complete. Edelman's and Muñoz's theorizing on queer futurity suggests that one is never fully interpellated; Muñoz takes this further by pointing out that through disidentification, subjects can shape ideology and thus themselves.

canonical fiction. I selected Walker's *The Color Purple* and Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* because they are crossover canonical books: they have received mainstream canonical acclaim and both been adapted for film. These authors occupy a queer space in that they have received prestigious literary awards and they are widely read and widely criticized.⁴ As I will show in the chapters that follow, both texts challenge the very form of the novel itself as critics debate whether the texts are indeed novels. For my third text, I wanted a recent representation of secondary lesbian caring, and I wanted a literary representation of a secondary lesbian who was part of a couple raising children. I searched for this specifically because I wanted to see if the pattern from *Bastard* and other texts where Magical Lesbians watch over children temporarily would play out with a secondary lesbian couple that had their own children. My options for such texts were limited, as lesbian couples with children increasingly emerge from mainstream popular authors such as Wally Lamb, Jodi Picoult, and Ann Patchett, but not as often from authors (such as Allison and Walker) that engage both literary and popular audiences. Thus I selected Louise Erdrich, as another crossover author, whose 2011 novel, *Shadow Tag*, (2011) was a New York Times best seller.⁵ While this particular novel may not have the vast body of literary criticism *The Color Purple* and *Bastard Out of Carolina* do, I explain in Chapter 4 that as an author, Erdrich occupies a similar space as Allison and Walker, as her work is read by literary critics and mainstream audiences. Likewise, she has been subject to similar scrutiny about whether or not her work fits into the novel form. Thus I am interested in these

⁴ Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* won the 1983 Pulitzer for fiction and the 1983 National Book Award; Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* was a finalist for the 1992 National Book Award.

⁵ Erdrich was a finalist in the 2009 Pulitzer for *The Plague of Doves* and received a National Book Award in 2012 for *The Round House*.

novels/authors because they are canonical and so widely read, yet also criticized for pushing the boundaries of accepted literary genres.

How I Use the Term *lesbian* in this Study

Many will note that in one of my texts, *The Color Purple*, the character who I call a Magical Lesbian, Shug Avery, enjoys sex with both men and women and thus could be thought of as bisexual or queer. In this project, I walk the blurry line of homosexuality identity constructs as I move away from notions of sexuality as fixed while I also bring sexuality to the foreground of my analysis. Perhaps I could have called these characters Magical Queers to avoid the essentialized notions of (white) identity the word lesbian evokes. After all, since it was reclaimed in the early 20th from sexologists, the word lesbian -- for different reasons -- has troubled White, Black, and Latina lesbian feminists. Using the term "queer" offers a way to acknowledge racial differences and has been widely adopted (Holland 258).⁶ Yet queer can also be problematic, as Jafari Allen points out that queer could "obfuscate the presences of lesbians in a movement that...had its own specific historical struggle over the "inclusion" of women?" (225). Alicia Arrizón's solution to this issue - the term "queer-lesbian" - could work (179). However, I choose to use lesbian for various reasons. For one, it keeps the focus on this study on the moments in texts showing women caretaking for one another when the caregiver has at some point had or desired sexual relationships with women. Furthermore, the term lesbian opens space for me to explore a temporality that is neither completely queer nor is it completely straight. As I

⁶ Sharon Holland explains, "the fiercest opposition to the label queer came from white middle-class gay men who wanted to identify with mainstream political and cultural identities" (258).

argue in this project Magical Lesbian carework consists of collections of what I term "lez-being" moments. By taking the adjective and noun lesbian and turning it into lez-being, a gerund, which is a verb taken out of time, I keep a troubled temporality -- one that is that is neither queer nor straight but functions as a link between these two temporalities -- at the forefront of my analysis. Thus, when I call Shug Avery a Magical Lesbian I am not making an argument about her sexual identity. Instead I point to the moments of lez-being in *The Color Purple* where Shug expresses both a sexual interest in women and performs caretaking for Celie, the novel's protagonist.

Specific Chapters, Topics, and Texts



(Queer Futurity Tumblr, Nov. 4, 2014)

"Dear Past Me, Hahah, get ready for your unopinionated heteronormative little world to change. You were not expecting this. Sincerely – queer you from the future." (Queer Futurity Tumblr, Nov. 4, 2014)

“dear future girlfriend,
i don’t know who you are and when you’re coming but when i know it..... i
think i’ll feel it. i wonder who you are, when you’ll pass by into my life. what
if you’re already here right now? i have no idea but i’m dying to find out your
favorite color, what you think about at 3am when you can’t sleep, your worst
fears, your passions, your favorite melody you’d listen to as a child. i want to
learn you like my favorite book. you are my story, and i am the reader.”
(Queer Futurity Tumblr, Nov. 4, 2014)

I open this section with examples from the Queer Futurity Tumblr as an example of the contemporary discourse on lesbian caregiving.⁷ Lesbian longing for *care* dominates the queer futurity Tumblr, with post after post of letters to future girlfriends. Filled with promises and expectation for future queer partners, these letters express both promises of care, such as backrubs, breakfast in bed, holding one another, and emotional healing, and longing for care from other women. Images on the Tumblr, such as the above example, point to the intersectionality of race, sexual orientation, and sexism as the woman in the comic responds to being harassed by pointing out that queerness and race co-exist in a way that challenges male privilege and access to women. This Tumblr demonstrates ways contemporary queer culture engages with academic queer theory, as there are quotes from Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga’s *This Bridge Called My Back*, and José Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*. Tumblr after Tumblr references Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, quoting his statement that “the future is queerness’s domain” (1). There is a robust conversation about lesbian caring and temporality taking place not within queer theory but on Tumblr, on television, in film, and in novels. While this discourse draws on queer theory (as the

⁷ Tumblr is a blog aggregation service where a person can pick a particular topic, such as Queer Futurity, then make a collage of various other blogs and images that address said topic.

Tumblr does), queer theory has yet to address the link between temporality and lesbian caring.

I chose to fill this theoretical gap with three novels as I wanted to reference historical literary representations of lesbian characters.⁸ Magical Lesbians are a contemporary phenomena, stretching back to films from late 1940's and 1950's pulp fiction, and they suggest that lesbians are useful for heterosexual families and other women to have around for the extra feminine labor they provide as they simultaneously de-eroticize lesbians to present them as suitable caretakers within a heterosexual system. I believe de-eroticized lesbian carework is a response to historical representations of secondary lesbian characters "perverting" paid women's positions such as maid and governesses.⁹ Yet, even Magical Lesbians perform either (sometimes both) the unpaid labor of nannies/governess and that of a wife for protagonists, I argue that they disrupt linear, heteronormative models of temporality. Furthermore, the co-occurrence of lesbian secondary characters with abusive men subtly destabilizes the notion of heterosexual relationships and families as ideal environments for children.

⁸ Future research on Magical Lesbians will engage with other mass mediated genres such as television and film.

⁹ For example, in *The Ladies Dispensatory: or Every Woman her Own Physician* [1740] Lillian Faderman notes that "sex between a young woman and her maid is placed in the category of masturbation" (298). A combination of social class and othered sexuality causes sexual activity between two women to be read as onanism for the young woman. Not only is eroticism among women erased, but also the very being of the maid ceases to exist - she becomes an appendage of her mistress. In later centuries, the lesbian governess appeared such as in Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and in *The Unlit Lamp* (1924) where "[t]he daughter and governess have a long unconsummated, ultimately ruptured lesbian relationship" (Stimpson 248). In Hall's work social class determines who gets to act on their erotic urges. While the governesses may have desires, their employment is contingent upon them remaining celibate. It is characters that are wealthy in Hall's work that can fulfill their lesbian desires.

Along the spectrum of Magical Lesbians in contemporary North American fiction, distinct patterns emerged for what their carework does in texts. Magical Lesbians use carework to rescue both adult women and children; to be "suitable" parents for adopted children, and they act as familial archives and archivists, collecting memories and releasing them into texts at strategic moments connecting protagonists to kin and ethnic communities.

I begin this study with a chapter about Alice Walker's Shug Avery, a well-studied, and as I argue In Chapter Two, "Shug Avery from Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* as a Magical Lesbian," a misread character. As a Magical Lesbian, Shug troubles Black heteropatriarchy. While Shug could be read as bisexual, I argue that she fits into the category of Magical Lesbian because the healing work she does is a social performance that is not necessarily tied to sexual acts. In other words, Shug's heterosexual sex does not negate the women centric, and thus lesbian (and lez-being), focus of her caregiving.¹⁰ While *The Color Purple* contains more lesbian eroticism than any other text in this project, Walker writes the one erotic scene in the text using metaphors of mothering. The metaphors used in this scene lay the groundwork for Magical Lesbians in future texts to become substitute mothers. Shug's moments of lez-being function in this text to return Celie to a whole experience of her body.

In Chapter Three, "Temporality and Magical Lesbians: Aunt Raylene from Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* and the Dialectic-Dialogic," I examine ways Magical

¹⁰ Judith Butler writes, "if the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" ("Performative Acts" 520).

Lesbian Aunt Raylene disputes rigid conceptions of lesbian/homosexual identity while complicating queer theorizing on reproductive futurity. A retired factory worker, Aunt Raylene lives on the outskirts of town, away from the rest of the extended Boatwright family. When the novel's protagonist, Bone, suffers chronic physical and sexual abuse from her stepfather, Aunt Raylene brings the abuse to other adults' attention and steps in to mother Bone when Bone's biological mother abandons her. Throughout the text, as Aunt Raylene engages in feminine caretaking, in particular childcare, she disidentifies with feminine gender norms by consciously selecting which types of femininity to embody.

In Chapter Four, "Time is Relative: Aunt May & Dialogism in Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*," I further investigate Magical Lesbians' relationship to temporality with the character May. As a Magical Lesbian, May stands out for a number of reasons: she has a long term partner for the entire text, a biological son who lives with her part time, and she rescues without ever revealing her own trauma to the novel's protagonist. May attempts to get her half-sister, Irene, out of an abusive relationship, but like Raylene, May ends up adopting her sister's children and cannot get her sister to leave her abusive husband. While Raylene shows that lesbian caring is part of reproductive futurity, May queers mothering. May shows us dialogic mothering which challenges both heteronormative and lesbian models of mothering. Rather than an identity, dialogic mothering is a praxis that can shift based on the needs of particular childcare situations.

I selected Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag* for this study because read together, they suggest new possibilities for reading reproductive futurity and queer temporality as in dialogue with one another. Each Magical Lesbian contributes to this theorizing. In Chapter 2, I read Shug

as demonstrating ways kinship can be a process as she claims protagonist Celie as her kin while demonstrating the affective moves Magical Lesbians can make through time in order to repair emotional wounds. In Chapter 3, we will see Aunt Raylene also use temporality to deal with trauma, and establish kinship, belonging, and to mother. Furthermore, Aunt Raylene challenges dialectic models of lesbian visibility and invisibility. Finally, in Chapter 4, Aunt May provides a model for mothering as a practice rather than an identity, while also demonstrating the importance of a queered temporality in claiming Native American ethnicity. Taken together, these texts demonstrate kinship and mothering as praxis rather than genetics.

As I mentioned earlier, the Magical Lesbian trope solves a problematic binary within existing theories of queer temporality. I demonstrate through my analysis of these three texts, queer futurity and reproductive futurity can be examined, as Sedgwick says, *beside* one another (8). Contemporary Magical Lesbians are often paired in texts with children, which as Edelman points out, are symbols of the future and potentiality. Yet, contrary to Edelman's separation of queerness from reproductive futurity, Magical Lesbians are the ones who provide futurity to children whom heterosexuality has failed. While Shug from Walker's *The Color Purple* does not caretake for any children, she revises Celie's childhood, and then releases Celie into a future filled with potentiality.¹¹ Carework, the labor expected from and taken for granted from women, is key to reimagining queer futurity, motherhood, and kinship. One of the Queer Futurity Tumblr writes to a future girlfriend "you are my story and I am the reader," and I think of the relationship between story and reader as I

¹¹ Celie ends up with her own business, home, reunited with her sister, and forms a close friendship with her formerly abusive husband.

begin this project. It is in literature where I go to find Magical Lesbians, to read them, to imagine a queer futurity filled with moments of lez-being.

CHAPTER TWO

SHUG AVERY FROM *THE COLOR PURPLE* AS A MAGICAL LESBIAN

Introduction

Published in 1982, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (TCP) won both the 1983 Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. The epistolary novel chronicles the suffering, liberation, and sexual awakening of Celie, an African American woman living in rural Georgia in the 1930s. Central to this novel, however, is a secondary character, Shug Avery, a lounge singer who is having an affair with Celie's husband. Shug frees Celie from her abusive marriage, reunites Celie with her sister, and offers Celie sexual, psychological, and spiritual enlightenment. In this chapter, I argue that as a Magical Lesbian (and a disidentified magic Negro) Shug Avery uses carework to rescue and liberate the protagonist, Celie, from *whatever she needs rescuing from*.

In my first chapter, I proposed the question: *why do Magical Lesbians in contemporary North American fiction refract feminine caring norms?* Feminine caring norms in the context of the family can be defined as: feeling responsible for carework; providing emotional support; cooking; cleaning; caring for the sick; and providing childcare.¹² In this chapter I explore what it means for lesbian representation that authors use secondary lesbians to express feminine caring norms. In particular, I argue that lesbian characters *refract* feminine caring norms. To refract is to change the course of light rays, "to mediate; to alter; to distort" ("Refract" OED). The Latin roots of the word come from the verb

¹² See: Davies, Celia. "Competence versus Care? Gender and Caring Work Revisited." *Acta Sociologica*. Vol. 38(1), 1995, pp 18 - 19; Ehrenreich, Barbara and Arlie Russell Hochschild. "Introduction." in *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. Eds. Ehrenreich, Barbara and Arlie Russell Hochschild. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2002.; Misra, Joya. "Caring about Care." *Feminist Studies*. Vol. 29 (2), Summer, 2003, pp. 386-401.

refringere meaning "to break, to deflect the course of (light rays), to break open, to repel" ("Refract" OED). Thus in this chapter, and the ones which follow it, I look at why secondary lesbian mediate, alter, and distort feminine caretaking norms and how this refraction impacts current theories of queer temporality and queer mothering.

In the texts I examine, particularly *The Color Purple*, a disembodied lesbian presence becomes a powerful means to elicit femininity in protagonists. In other words, these secondary characters have a deep effect on protagonists when protagonists think or talk about them. I read this as a suggestion that there is a cultural discomfort with lesbian desire. By using disembodied lesbian presence, authors negotiate lesbian inclusion without threatening heteronormativity. However, I also argue that these lesbian images must be read as transgressive, even as they normalize. Within the roots of the word *refract* is the idea of breaking open and repelling - I look in these texts to see ways that women's desire for women reveals an instability already present in women's caretaking expectations in heteronormative families.¹³

The instability of feminine caretaking norms was at the center of second wave feminism. Perhaps no book articulates this instability better than Betty Friedan's classic *The Feminine Mystique*:

I have heard so many women try to deny this dissatisfied voice within themselves because it does not fit the pretty picture of femininity the experts have given them [. . .] Women who suffer this problem, in whom this voice is stirring, have lived their whole lives in the pursuit of feminine fulfillment...they are women whose greatest ambition has been marriage and children (27).

¹³ I am referring to the types of families I find in this study: white and black rural poor, middle class Native American. While I am not arguing that these texts represent all families, I look at them as case studies of families from different socio-economic and racial locations.

Friedan implores women to recognize that "femininity" is a construct which traps women into thinking that housework, marriage, and children are what women should aspire to. In addition to Friedan, another second wave feminist also noted that femininity was a slippery social construct. De Beauvoir writes that:

not every female human being is necessarily a woman; she must take part in this mysterious and endangered reality known as femininity. Is femininity secreted by the ovaries? Is it enshrined in Platonic heaven? Is a frilly petticoat enough to bring it down to earth? Although some women zealously strive to embody it, the model has never been patented. It is typically described in vague and shimmering terms borrowed from a clairvoyant's vocabulary (3).

In this passage, de Beauvoir points out that while femininity can be embodied, it has no empirical basis. De Beauvoir's focus on the language of femininity as "vague," "shimmering" and "borrowed from a clairvoyant's vocabulary" suggests that femininity is observable but that there is no way to measure it, thus divorcing femininity from Western epistemology. She ultimately decides that femininity is defined by "otherness" from men; however, de Beauvoir's theorizing about femininity is based on prescribed behavioral differences rather than biological ones (5). If lesbian characters enact a Friedan version of femininity, does this serve to keep femininity "othered" in the sense that de Beauvoir means it? In other words, if lesbian women are represented in contemporary fiction as models of femininity traditionally associated with heteronormativity, does that serve to keep heteronormative femininity intact? If lesbian characters provide a reparative femininity for other women, does this end up keeping femininity "othered"? In 2013, Wally Lamb, a mainstream, best selling, heterosexual, white male author published *We Are Water*. While the novel is centered on the ex-husband of a woman protagonist who after twenty-three years of marriage divorces him and marries a woman, mainstream LGBT organizations recognized it as a lesbian novel, even making it as a finalist for LAMBDA's 2014 "Best Lesbian Novel."

At the end of the novel, the protagonist declares that his ex-wife, thanks to her lesbian marriage, has finally learned what it means to be a wife. Thus in this contemporary, mainstream piece, lesbianism becomes a place where a heterosexual woman who provided little caretaking to her husband and children learns to be caring and feminine. Thus, lesbianism does not challenge the construct of (white) heteronormative femininity, but instead becomes a model of it.¹⁴

However, in this chapter on *The Color Purple*, I explore Black femininity which has historically been marked as "other" to white femininity. Barbara Christian states that in early American history, Black femininity was "a dumping ground for those female functions a basically Puritan society could not confront" (2). Patricia Hill Collins explains that the "mammy images as Other symbolize the oppositional difference of mind/body and culture/nature thought to distinguish Black women from everyone else" (72). Hill Collins notes that there are four stereotypes of black femininity: mammies, matriarchs, welfare queens, and jezebels, which all serve to mark black women as unfeminine because they challenge patriarchal structures of the family (74). Thus, notions of femininity are intertwined with the nuclear family and the state; as Hill Collins explains, "aggressive, assertive women are penalized--they are abandoned by their men, end up impoverished,

¹⁴ In Lamb's novel, the protagonist's ex-wife's voluntary caretaking of him once he loses the use of his legs through cooking for him, bathing him, and spending weekends with him causes him to recognize that she is now a "better wife." In this context, caretaking behavior becomes a more important marker of femininity than sexual attraction to men. Friedan notes the relationship between carework and femininity as she documents a housewife's labor of making sandwiches for children, doing dishes, laundry (27 - 28). Thus carework is a behavioral marker of this slippery notion of femininity. And indeed, feminist scholars note that carework is overwhelmingly women's labor (Misra 399). What does it mean, then, when mainstream, popular North American authors like Wally Lamb, Jodi Picoult, and Ann Patchett to name a few, show unhappily married women rescued by lesbians?

and are stigmatized as being unfeminine" (75). The character of Shug Avery challenges these outcomes as she ends up wealthy even though she is stigmatized because of her sexual behavior.

Christian, de Beauvoir, Friedan, and Hill Collins all point out that femininity is a problematic construct because it defines women as "other" and therefore less human than men. Christian and Hill Collins point out that racism structures black femininity as more othered than white femininity. So what does it mean when a Black queer character embodies the problematic construct that is femininity? I argue that representing lesbians as feminine domesticates them, thus rendering lesbian challenges to patriarchal structures less dangerous, even as their very presence disrupts heteronormativity.

In this chapter, I read Shug Avery as a Magical Lesbian who rescues, protects, and empowers a woman trapped in a marriage who suffers from institutionalized racism, familial sexual violence, and poverty. I argue that Shug Avery's feminine carework in *The Color Purple* reconciles lesbian eroticism through feminine caretaking between women. Shug Avery simultaneously transgresses and reifies black femininity as she offers straight culture reassurance that lesbianism can be absorbed into heteronormative family systems without challenging feminine norms. Unlike the Magical Lesbian characters that follow her, Shug Avery does replace gender inequality in one heterosexual marriage with mutual respect. While it is possible to read Shug as bisexual, as she enjoys sex with men and women, as I mentioned in Chapter One, I read her as a Magical Lesbian because her carework is for other women, not men, and because she performs lesbianism through her relationship with Celie. When performing lesbianism, Shug makes strategic use of compulsory heterosexuality by shielding herself from social strictures against lesbianism

by expressing herself sexually with Celie when both of them are married to men. Shug Avery, like other Magical Lesbians, manages to protect the status quo even as she rescues another woman from it. For *The Color Purple* and the other texts I analyze, femininity (either by appearance or behavior) is the price of admission for lesbian characters. In this chapter, I first explore the role of Shug's body in the text, as she rescues other characters both with her body and with her existence, as when Celie thinks about Shug, she has a healing effect on her. Next, I explore how Shug uses gender performativity to both save Celie and challenge patriarchy. After that I examine the role of disembodied pleasure in the text and ways the text separates touch from eroticism while privileging vision as a site of sexual pleasure. Finally, I explore how Shug negotiates the institutions of motherhood and heterosexual marriage. Ultimately, Shug demonstrates ways Magical Lesbians provide reparative care for individual women but do not threaten institutions. Shug changes Celie's life, but while she skillfully negotiates women's oppression that is caused by marriage, gender norms, and the heteronormative family, she does not offer Celie a life outside these oppressions. Instead, she shows Celie how to navigate them and become whole within their confines.

Past Criticism on *The Color Purple*

Much of the critical work on *The Color Purple* (TCP) centers on its epistolary form and Walker's use of African American Vernacular English. Critics are divided in their interpretation of the form.¹⁵ For critics who read *The Color Purple* as radical and

¹⁵ For example, Lauren Berlant argues that language in TCP "radically resituates the subject's national identity within a mode of aesthetic, not political, representation" and that "[w]hile political language is laden with the historical values and associations of patriarchal

transformative, it is more than an aesthetic challenge, it also confronts social structure of race, gender, and sexuality. For example, King-Kok Cheung explains that the text overcomes oppressive structures as “gender and ethnicity – inhibitive forces when these texts open – eventually become the sources of personal and stylistic strengths” (163). Furthermore, Linda Selzer argues that the text presses up against and moves past binary conceptions of public and private as separate. She writes, “rather than opposing public and private spheres, Walker’s narrative underscores their interpenetration” (Selzer 78). Critics have also argued that the characters of Celie and Shug in *TCP* challenge compulsory heterosexuality.

Focusing on how Walker uses language to establish a feminist rewriting of *Clarissa*, Linda Abbandonato claims that lesbian sexuality in *TCP* is liberatory:

In loving Shug, Celie becomes a desiring subject and in being loved by Shug, she is made visible to herself as an object of desire [. . .] By choosing “deviancy,” “immaturity,” and the “sickness” that lesbianism signifies in a system of compulsory

power, aesthetic discourse here carries with it a utopian force that comes to be associated with the spirit of everyday life relations among women” (833). Even though AAVE has been the subject of intense political debate, Berlant argues for an aesthetics which is separate from politics. On the other hand, bell hooks points out that aesthetics are political as she argues that the form of the *TCP* “parodies those primary texts of autobiographical writing which have shaped and influenced the direction of African-American fiction – the ‘slave narrative’” (464). For hooks, the narrative arc of Celie’s childhood through her adult liberation echoes slave narratives. Thus for critics who view the text as transformative, Walker’s narrative structure and use of epistolary, and AAVE demonstrate an aesthetic that transgresses not just on the level of story but on the level of form. However not all critics recognize Walker’s use of AAVE as a strength; Margaret Walsh refers to the epistolary form as “permitting Walker to tell her story with an almost folktale plainness and lack of complexity” (90). This conflation of AAVE with simplicity is a racist misunderstanding of linguistics. AAVE is a discrete language system that is interpreted as simplistic and plain by white critics. Linguists recognize AAVE as a complex language system. For example, Lisa J. Green argues in *African American English: A Linguistic Introduction* that African American English is a complete linguistic system with a unique lexicon (19). And Marcyliena Morgan points out that AAVE contains verb tenses that Standard English does not (283).

heterosexuality, Celie enacts a critique not of the oedipal theory itself but of the sexist socialization that it insightfully yet uncritically represents (1112).

Thus for Abbandonato, Celie's lesbian relationship with Shug, and her subsequent refusal to have sexual relationships with men, is key to the transgressive power of Walker's text. However, in contrast to Abbandonato's view of lesbianism as key to the liberatory power of *TCP*, bell hooks argues that the sexual desire between Shug and Celie functions as a catalyst for spiritual transformation but that sexuality is not in and of itself transformative (456; 460). I fall in neither Abbandonato nor hooks' camp in my assessment of the lesbianism in the text. Abbandonato's analysis assumes that any lesbian representation is a challenge to heteronormativity. As I show in this chapter, representation does not automatically equal social transformation. I complicate Abbandonato's analysis by showing that the lesbianism in *The Color Purple* both transgresses and reifies heteronormativity. On the other hand, hooks' main criticism of the novel takes a Marxist angle as she argues that Celie would not have had time to write, given all the work she has to do and argues that because Celie never complains about not having time to write, the text is a fantasy (460)¹⁶. For hooks, the lesbianism between Celie and Shug is inconsequential and an aesthetic weakness of the text as she argues that it is unrealistic that their community would accept their lesbian relationship (456). However, while hooks may be right that the lesbianism in *TCP* does not ultimately challenge the heteropatriarchy, Shug and Celie's lesbian relationship casts attention on the difficulty women have getting their material and spiritual needs met within heterosexuality. In other words, Shug's presence and Shug and

¹⁶ Celie's sister, Nettie, who is a missionary in West Africa also writes letters to Celie does at one point say "It has been a long time since I had time to write" (155).

Celie's sexual desire for each other do disrupt this text, even as it reifies the norms of black femininity.

The ways that Shug has been flattened and misrepresented by critics exemplify critical reflection of contemporary cultural biases towards viewing secondary characters as one-sided. As a result, some critical interpretations of Shug stray from the text as they mold her to match Western views of heroes and mythic helpers. Other critical interpretations read Shug as an African American version of white canonical texts. These critical interpretations shape Shug into pre-existing sidekick tropes, overlooking Walker's intervention into secondary character roles. In some ways, it is unfair to label characters as types, but it is also a move that connects texts to one another. Reading Shug as a Magical Lesbian may run the risk of repeating this mistake. My goal with this trope – which Shug herself inspired – is to attend to a pattern I have noticed in North American literature . I read the various iterations of the Magical Lesbian as in dialogue with one another, rather than an expression of an archetype. Furthermore, I argue that this character pattern coincides with the dominant neo-liberal political impetus of lesbian normalization and lesbian integration into nation building. Unlike Rich's claim that lesbianism is a threat to heteronormative society because it is "a form of nay-saying to patriarchy, an act of resistance" the Magical Lesbian offers straight culture a reassurance that lesbianism can be absorbed into heteronormative systems without actually challenging the nuclear family system. The fact that (mostly) secondary characters who share a sexual interest in women save the day for female protagonists reveals something about the way lesbian representations are in dialogue with the heteronormative world. I argue that the Magical Lesbian sometimes reifies female responsibilities for caring labor and mothering and

sometimes strategically positions lesbians as necessary parts of families and social networks.

As Shug herself resists simple categorizations of a kind or wicked character, I strive to acknowledge both the transgressive and normalizing functions of the Magical Lesbian in this text. Critical interpretations of Shug fall into three camps: a) they use language which alludes to Shug as a rescuer b) they suggest she is a fairy godmother c) they argue that she is a villain because of her sexual behavior. For example, Abbandonato says that Celie is “rescued” by Shug (1111). hooks writes that, “Shug initiates Celie into a spiritual awakening” (460); Charles Proudfit argues that Shug “facilitat[es] Celie’s sensual awakening to female adult sexuality and a healthy emotional life” (13). Kimberly Chambers describes Shug as “provid[ing] the emotional support for Celie’s personal evolution” (56). Brenda R. Smith says Shug “facilitates Celie’s journey to heroic selfhood” (9). Facilitate, provide, initiate, and rescue: each of these verbs places Shug in the position of problem solver. Smith refers to Shug as Celie’s “guide” (9). Berlant describes Shug as “the novel’s professor of desire and self-fulfillment” (838). The nouns used to describe Shug’s role match the verbs: Shug gives but does not need. My analysis will show this is not the case, as I argue that Shug has a strong desire to be accepted by heteropatriarchy. While Walker presents Shug as having her own intense desires for social acceptance (throughout the novel Shug longs to be married to a man even as she recognizes the domination that comes with marriage), it is in the critical readings that she appears to have no other purpose than saving Celie.

For example, Raphaël Lambert argues her character contains “the paradigm of the fairy[. . .] even if Shug is not a traditional fairy or godmother” (46). Margaret Walsh reads

Shug as a “magic helper” (90). Similar to other critics, Walsh reads *TCP* as a retelling of, rather than in dialogue with, the Western canon; as she writes, “what Walker has essentially done, then, is to retell one of the most beloved tales that we tell ourselves and about our human existence, the Cinderella story” (90). Though Linda Abandonnato makes a powerful anti-sexist, anti-homophobic argument in her analysis, she moors *TCP* to *Clarissa* and the classic white, male literary canon. I read Abandonnato’s move as an attempt to legitimize her anti-sexist, anti-homophobic argument by keeping her analysis white-centric. This problematic, albeit common, move in the LGBTQ movement oversimplifies the relationship of *TCP* to the literary canon. Presenting *TCP* as worthy of critical attention because it is a rewriting of a white, male, heterosexual text presents African American texts and language as imitations of white language and texts. Reading *TCP* as derivative of white stories rather than in dialogue with them limits our ability to analyze the text. For example, considering that *Clarissa* was published in England in 1748, during the height of the slave trade, and that Walker alludes directly and indirectly to the British involvement in the slave trade in the *TCP*, referring to *TCP* as a “rewriting” of *Clarissa* whitewashes the text. In other words, Walker historicizes her text in terms of the legacy of slavery, while Abbandonato’s reading of *TCP* and *Clarissa* ignores it. Had Abbandonato historicized *Clarissa* in the context of slavery it would have lead to a more nuanced comparison between the two texts.

Critical views of *TCP* as mythic reveal how this text troubles critics. Brenda R. Smith argues that *The Color Purple* provides a much needed “relevant, relatable, life-changing myth of empowerment” (18). While she relegates *TCP* to the realm of the impossible, she argues that this impossibility is strength. While there are no instances of magic in the story,

many critics nonetheless read this text as mythic and fairy tale like.¹⁷ Critics who read *TCP* only in the context of the Western canon also tend to view Shug as a villain. Brenda R. Smith, who reads *TCP* as a *Bildungsroman* views Shug as “both rescuer and seducer” (13). And Philip M. Royster, in his attack on Walker refers to Shug as a villain, arguing that, “Shug successfully corners off the emotionally crippled Celie for sexual purposes and manipulates her into sitting on the porch [. . .] while Shug chases around the country after her sexual fancies” (368). Criticism of the lesbian relationship between Shug and Celie is also prevalent in these readings. For example, Trudier Harris claims that Shug and Celie’s lesbian relationships “represents the height of silly romanticism” (157). Philip Royster reads the lesbianism in the novel as reactive to sexual abuse and Walker’s own problems with her father: “Alice Walker cannot afford to allow her protagonists to enjoy male sexuality, not merely because the protagonists believe that males are, by nature, inadequate humans [. . .] but also because all the males with potential for sexual relations with Walker’s protagonists may be masks for her father” (367). Royester’s ad hominem attack ignores the reconciliation Shug facilitates between Celie and Mr.____. Thus, negative critical readings of the text center on the novel’s perceived deviance from realism and the portrayals of black masculinity.

My reading does not center on realism, but on patterns of representations. Shug not only inspired my theory of the Magical Lesbian, but she also disidentifies with the magic Negro trope (Glenn & Cunningham 137). In *Disidentification*, José Esteban Muñoz

¹⁷ This echoes the ghettoization of literature by women of color (both in and outside of North America) into the genre of “magical realism.” Stephen Slemon points out that magical realism exists in a “theoretical vacuum” and is an “oxymoron” and is most often found “in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions” (9 - 10). Thus magical realism is more of a marker of an author’s status as outsider of Western, white culture than literary content.

explains that, “disidentification is the third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology” (11). In other words, rather than reject the magical/fairy tale/Anglicized readings of *TCP*, I work on and against them. By acknowledging the connection of reading oppressed characters as “magical” to wider systems of oppression, I am able to examine how the trope of the Magical Lesbian challenges and conforms to dominant ideologies. Using the lens of feminine carework, focusing on ways Shug supports, protects, and connects Celie, I examine how Shug disidentifies both the magical Lesbian and the magical Negro trope.

Shug's Disembodied Soothing and Protecting

When Shug's body is not in a scene, but other characters are talking or thinking about her, her disembodied presence facilitates rescue, self-care, and self-soothing for Celie, Nettie, and Mr.____. We will see this pattern repeated in other texts I analyze: disembodied Magical Lesbians connect protagonists to themselves and/or to those around them. In other words, disembodied Magical Lesbian power suggests an underlying cultural discomfort with lesbian bodies. In *The Color Purple*, stories and pictures of Shug Avery have a protective and healing impact long before her body enters scenes. From Shug's first appearance in the novel, she protects both Celie (the protagonist) and Nettie (Celie's sister) from abusive men. When Shug appears in the novel, her existence stops Nettie from being married off to Mr.____. Mr.____ asks Nettie's father for permission to marry Nettie, but her father refuses because of Mr.____'s affair with Shug Avery (6). Shug's sexual deviance protects Nettie from Mr.____.

Shug does not protect Celie from marriage; instead, Celie is soothed in her abusive marriage by a picture of Shug and by knowing that Shug enjoys sex. After Celie's stepmother gives her a picture of Shug, Shug begins to act as a salve for Celie's oppression by men (6). The earliest images in the text are of Shug as "the most beautiful woman [Celie] ever saw" (16). These first images of Shug as beautiful echo early Nineteenth century portrayals of lesbians as "exotic and evil" (Faderman 297). Lillian Faderman notes that in Nineteenth century images "with few exceptions, the lesbian in such fiction is beautiful – which often accounts for her powers of destruction" (297). Even though Walker presents Shug's beauty as healing, there are hints of older lesbian tropes in Celie and Shug's relationship. When Celie finds out her father is essentially giving her to Mr. ____ in marriage, Celie writes, "I take out the picture of Shug Avery. I look into her eyes. Her eyes says Yeah, it *bees* that way sometime" (author's emphasis 18). Since Celie has no means to stop the marriage, she turns to the image of Shug for comfort. After her wedding, one of Mr. ____'s children attacks Celie with a rock, then Mr. ____ rapes her. Celie once again turns to stories about Shug: "I think bout Shug Avery. I know what he doing to me he done to Shug Avery and maybe she like it. I put my arm around him" (21). Thus Shug's pleasure in sex brings some relief to Celie by offering Celie a vision of another possibility.

While Shug's existence prevents Nettie's early marriage and soothes Celie during the unbearable circumstance of her marriage, Shug's sexual behavior is not comforting to all secondary women in the text. Celie's sisters-in-law blame Shug for the problems in Mr. ____'s previous marriage, "he just brought her here, dropped her, and kept right on running after Shug Avery" (27). But for Celie, she continues to be a hero. When her sisters-in-law take her shopping, Celie "think what color Shug Avery would wear. She look like a

queen to me so I say to Kate, Somethin purple" (28). Here, thinking about Shug helps Celie claim some power, but even though Celie is told that Mr.____ won't pay for colors that are "Too happy lookin", she continues to look towards Shug for inspiration (28).

Simply hearing that Shug is coming to town thrills Celie (24). While anticipating Shug's arrival, Mr.____ and Celie have their first actual conversation as his preparations to go see Shug bring a moment of tenderness between them. Celie tells Mr.____, "You looks nice, I say, Any woman be proud" (24). Mr.____ responds with, "You think so?" and Celie notices, "First time he ast me" (24). This moment of both Mr.____ and Celie's anticipation of seeing Shug forms the first real connection between them. Shug's image also connects Celie to herself as it awakens her. Even though Celie will not be going to see Shug Avery with Mr.____, the show's flyer "burning a hole in my pocket" (24). Since Celie has been married to Mr.____ and her sister Nettie left for Africa, her focus has been on staying alive, but in this moment Celie experiences desire, "Lord, I wants to go so bad" (21, 25). Before Celie has even met her Shug, she connects Celie to her own humanity and rescues her from emotionlessness. Even after this moment, Celie is still beset with affectlessness. For example while being beaten by Mr.____, Celie describes herself as a tree (22). And while "everybody say how good I is to Mr.____ children [. . .] I don't feel nothing for them. Patting Harpo back not even like patting a dog. It more like patting another piece of wood. Not a living tree, but a table" (29). The moment of vitality Celie experiences just thinking about Shug's show is remarkable evidence of how Shug functions as a Magical Lesbian: her mere existence begins to connect Celie to herself. This pattern is repeated in other novels as Magical Lesbians often represent *safe* desire. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, minor characters act as a containment space for what Judith Roof refers to as the "perverse possibilities" of

queerness (7). Shug not only contains female sexual desire, but her image and existence soothes and invigorate Celie. While this will change once Shug's body enters the text, in the abstract, Shug's existence, particularly knowledge of her sexual actions, is enough.

Interestingly, the other characters who criticize Shug focus their criticisms on her body: she's too black, she has too much sex, she "look like window dressing" (20).

Other secondary characters do not like Shug because she resembles the Jezebel. Patricia Hill Collins notes that the function of the Jezebel trope was to "relegate all Black women to the category of sexually aggressive women, thus providing powerful rationale for widespread sexual assaults by white men reported by Black slave women" (77). In a study of stereotypes of black femininity in *Essence* magazine, Woodward and Mastin noted that during the 1990s, *Essence* magazine had a significant number of articles that reinforced the stereotype (277). I argue that in *The Color Purple*, Shug's price of admission is negative gossip; however, Celie's knowledge of the pleasure Shug finds in sex heals her.¹⁸ But Shug's unabashed pleasure from sex ostracizes her from a primary caring institution: the Black church. Hill-Collins argues the church is a supporting place for Afrocentric feminist values and caring, "Black women have long had the support of the Black church, an institution with deep roots in the African past and a philosophy that accepts and encourages expressiveness and an ethic of caring" (217). Walker's text works against Patricia Hill Collins' essentialization of Africa: not only does Celie's sister present a non-

¹⁸ This is contrasted with the price of admission for a lesbian body into many contemporary novels or TV shows: these lesbians must either be heroic, and/or have special powers, and/or or engage in feminized caretaking. One example of secondary heroic lesbians is Betty from the Canadian TV series *Bomb Girls*. Even after another character (Kate) refuses her sexually, Betty rescues Kate from her abusive father and takes the blame when Kate accidentally kills him in self-defense.

romanticized Africa during her missionary work, but Walker's representation of the Black church as having strictures against female sexuality challenges notions of a monolithic African past. Walker further complicates this romanticization by showing that the very thing about Shug which has helped Celie and Nettie casts her out of the caring community: "Shug Avery sick and nobody in this town want to take the Queen Honeybee in. Her mammy say She told her so. Her pappy say, Tramp. A woman at church say she dying...some kind of nasty woman disease" (43). Shug's sexual activities and thus connection with the image of the Jezebel have cast her out. Thus, the community's response to Shug also represents both the double standard of sexual expectations for men and women and an internal sexual / gender based racial policing. Shug has been described by other women as "black as my shoe" (20); Shug's refusal to conform sexually to the community standards removes her from kin and community networks of caring, even as her sexual deviance protects Nettie from sexual abuse and removes Celie from an abusive situation. This presents caring in rural African American communities as conditional, based on sexual conformity. Unsurprisingly, being "too black" is paired with Shug having too much sex. Walker suggests here that Shug's lack of respectability leads other characters to view her as more black. When Mr. ____'s sisters criticize Shug's color as too dark alongside her sexual behavior, Shug is compared with another disembodied dark skinned woman: Mr. ____'s ex-wife. Mr. ____'s sister calls Mr. ____'s ex-wife "too black" (20). Being "too black" is paired with not being pretty, and for Shug, blackness is paired with an object connected to fetishes and the abject: a shoe.

Aside from soothing Celie during her rape and protecting Nettie, stories about Shug protect another secondary woman character from being beaten by her husband. When

Harpo (Mr.____'s son) starts beating his wife Sofia because he is upset that his wife isn't as submissive as Celie, Celie uses Shug as an example. "Do Shug Avery mind Mr.____? I ast. She the woman he want to marry. She call him Albert, tell him his drawers stink in a minute" (63). In this case, Celie uses Shug to make Harpo accept his wife as she is. Celie even tells Harpo, "Some women can't be beat, I say. Sofia one of them" (63). Celie's (or Walker's?) invocation of Shug as an example of non-submissive femininity is interesting here, as it is paired with an emphasis on marriage. Does Mr.____ want Shug because she would be a challenge to "tame"? Or does he desire her because she is independent? Mr.____ desires Shug within the institution of marriage, which he has used to rape, beat, and control Celie. On the other hand, Shug herself sometimes desires to be married to Mr.____ and is sometimes grateful that she is not. The duality Shug expresses towards marriage -- wanting it and not wanting it -- speaks to the pull of heterosexual marriage as an institution. Shug does not need marriage for financial support, sexual satisfaction, or companionship. Yet she desires marriage for its social acceptability. However, Shug is blocked from marrying Mr.____ by his father, which demonstrates black patriarchal enforcement of colorism and sexual control. Once Shug becomes ill, she moves in with Mr.____ and Celie. Mr.____'s father complains about Shug being at the house he gave to Mr.____. His critique of Shug focuses on her dark skin and sexual activities. He emphasizes her blackness, saying, "she black as tar, she nappy headed" then adds "she ain't even clean. I hear she got the nasty woman disease" (54). Through Shug, Walker connects critiques of blackness with critiques of sexuality, Shug's body reminding us that blackness and sexuality are inscribed by and intertwined with each other. Hill Collins notes that the association of Black beauty with light skin is "applied to us by white men, white women, Black men, and, most painfully, one

another" (80). Walker uses Mr.____'s father to mark Black male participation in enforcing these beauty and sexuality strictures on Black women. Yet, even though Mr.____ has benefited from sexism and patriarchy, his love of Shug bonds him with Celie as the two of them silently resist his father. As Mr.____'s father calls Shug a whore, Celie remarks that "Mr.____ look up at me, our eyes meet. This the closest us ever felt" (55). Though Shug is not in this scene, Mr.____ and Celie's opinions of her serve to liberate them both from colorism and sexual control. Ideas of black femininity are thus widened for both Celie and Mr.____ even as Mr.____'s father works to enforce restrictive gender, sexual, and racial codes of behavior. Shug offers both a critique of systems of heteronormativity, sexism, and colorism, but with Shug's attachment to heterosexual relationships, Walker makes her one of the more complicated queer characters in contemporary North American fiction. Once Magical Lesbians in other texts enter lesbian relationships, they never return to heterosexuality. Rather than being complicit in compulsive heterosexuality, Shug complicates lesbian representation by reflecting the limits on lesbian sexual expression in her community. She does not represent the fantastical fairy godmother and magical helper that critics Lambert and Walsh claim she is; instead, Shug shows a true price of lesbian admission: assimilation into heterosexual worlds (46, 90).

Part of Shug's rescue of Celie entails Shug taking Celie out of state, and then leaving Celie at her house while she goes on tour, distancing Celie from both experiencing lesbian desire and being desired as well as from caring labor. Without Shug around, Celie does not use her creative energy on carework. After Celie has lived with Shug for a few months, Shug leaves to go on the road. Celie tries to go with her, saying "Let me go with you...I can press your clothes, do your hair" (211). Shug rejects Celie's offer for two reasons: 1) "[Shug] can

act like she not bored in front of an audience of strangers, a lot of them white, but she wouldn't have the nerve to try to act in front of me" and 2) "Besides...you not my maid. I didn't bring you to Memphis to be that. I brought you here to love you and help you get on your feet" (211). Is Shug shying away from intimacy with Celie? She rejects Celie's offer for reciprocal carework, othering it and saying it is the work of a maid, which Celie should not do, now that Shug loves her and sees her as fully human. One way to interpret this is that Walker "others" certain types of carework, such as pressing hair and mending as for maids, while affirms the carework Shug does for Celie -- cooking, providing emotional support and financial backing -- as necessary for women's creativity. However, earlier in the text, it was Celie's work with Shug's hair that Shug credits with helping her come up with a new song. But Shug has recognized this time as her being unfair to Celie and treating her like "a servant" (122). There are a number of issues going on with these two exchanges. One is that Walker has associated carework between women as providing space for creativity. Celie's caring helps Shug come up with a new song; Shug's caring allows Celie to begin sewing pants and eventually open her own company. Yet within this exchange, Shug twice associates caring with being a maid. Being a maid has a negative connotation in Shug's statements about it: she both apologizes for treating Celie that way and points out that if Celie comes on the road, Celie will not have the space to develop her own creativity. Furthermore, the term maid has a negative connotation by the other plotlines in the text -- Albert uses it to insult Celie and say she is not good enough to be with Shug; after Sofia punches the white mayor in the face, she is sentenced to be a maid in his home. Sofia's forced caring for the mayor's family is an example of unpaid carework as a vector of racial oppression, and in this case one that evokes the institution of slavery. After Sofia has

served her sentence, Eleanor Jane, the white girl she cared for, comes by with a crisis and interrupts the family dinner when Celie stands up to Albert and Shug announces they are leaving (203). This interruption serves to keep the idea of willing versus unwilling carework in the background. Furthermore, Shug marks that in the realm of unpaid carework (as opposed to the carework of Sophia's forced servitude) it is not the particulars of carework that turn women into maids - it is the attitude with which the carework is received.

Though Celie is quite willing to do carework and accompany Shug, Shug refuses Celie's caring. Celie then stays at Shug's house to make pants. Shug provides the money for the material, and once Celie has made "the perfect pair of pants" for Shug, Shug wears the pants on the road and soon Celie is swamped with orders (213). Thus Shug's refusal of Celie's offer to press her hair and hem her dresses - work that Shug deemed maid work - frees Celie for the creative labor of pants making. When Celie's attention is not focused on Shug's body, Celie sublimates her desire into clothing and other bodies. When Magical Lesbians are absent, protagonists often cultivate their caring for others, but Shug is unique in that she prompts Celie to start a business.¹⁹ Furthermore, the pants function as a polyvalent symbol. They are representative of economic freedom, masculinity, lesbian femininity, and, as they cover genitalia they also contain desire, and represent social respectability. Furthermore, they are a means for Celie to make peace with her unfeminine body. When Shug first comes up with the idea for Celie to make pants, she tells Celie "she

¹⁹ Annie from Wally Lamb's *We Are Water* (2013), learns to be the caretaking wife her husband always wanted once she marries a woman; Zoe from Jodi Picoult's *Sing You Home* (2011), becomes a better daughter and teacher once she enters a lesbian relationship; Sabine from Ann Patchett's *The Magician's Assistant* (1998) finds a purpose in life through caretaking.

ain't made like no dress" (146). Shug points to the limits of gender norms, and when Celie objects to pants because she thinks Mr.____ won't let her, Shug replies "Why not?...It's scandless, the way you look out there plowing in a dress" (147). Here Shug evokes traditional feminine modesty to get Celie to stop thinking she has to wear dresses - Shug presents pants as more feminine because they will be more modest when Celie is plowing. Finally, Shug shows pants are a way to play with gender roles, saying, "I used to put on Albert's pants when he was courting. And he one time put on my dress" (147). Yet after Shug has cemented the idea of pants as protecting Celie's feminine modesty while she plows, she points out that playing with gender used to be part of her sexual activities with Albert. While Shug sees Celie's shape as possibility for playing with gender, in contrast Albert uses Celie's shape in a list of reasons she is not a good woman:

Shug gots looks, he say....But what about you? You ugly. You skinny. You shape funny...All you fit to do in Memphis is be Shug's maid. Take out her slop-jar and maybe cook her food. You not that good a cook either. And this house ain't been clean good since my first wife died. And nobody crazy or backward enough to marry you, neither (205).

Albert's litany centers on Black woman tropes. Celie is too skinny, not shaped right, and only good enough to be a maid. As Celie does not find men sexually attractive, her non-feminine shape keeps her desire for women from threatening the patriarchy. Celie's body is un-feminized by her pants and un-desirable by men, thus her lesbian desire is unproblematic in the frame of the novel. On the other hand, Shug's lesbian desire must be mediated because of her very feminine appearance. One way this occurs is through removing Shug's body from scenes. Another way Walker dilutes the potential threat of Shug's desire is through being explicit about the price of the ticket for women's same-sex desire in mainstream texts. Through Shug's complex relationship with male desire and her

feelings about marriage, we see the price. However, when Shug's desire for male attention is disembodied, it is healing for Celie.

When Celie leaves Shug's house in Memphis to stay in Georgia fixing up a house she has inherited, Shug's complex relationship with male desire emerges. In Memphis, Shug begins an affair with a nineteen-year-old member of her band. Celie is heartbroken, but Shug says, "I missed you, Celie. And you know I'm a high natured woman" (250). At first Shug claims this affair is about the desires of her body. But then, she admits that the affair is about her desire to be desired. Shug explains, "I'm getting old. I'm fat. Nobody think I'm good looking no more, but you. Or so I thought" (250). Here Shug is lamenting the loss of her feminine body and expressing a desire to be wanted by men. Celie is very upset, and then Shug begs her:

All I ast is six months. Just six months to have my last fling. I got to have it Celie. I'm too weak a woman not to. But if you just give me six months, Celie, I will try to make our life together like it was (250).

Celie is so mad that Shug gets "down on her knees...tears falling all over the place" (250). While critics such as Royster argue that this scene makes Shug a villain, I argue that it is what makes her safe as a queer character and Magical Lesbian (368). Her desire to be wanted by men makes her less of a threat to patriarchal gender relationships and keeps Celie's awkward lesbianism from being too threatening. Shug is conflicted here as she makes Celie promise not to leave her while she is off with her new man, Germaine (251). In this scene Shug becomes desperate for both Celie's love and the social acceptance that being wanted by a younger man brings her. Shug's adherence to patriarchal norms of passive femininity – being desired instead of desiring – suppresses the disruptive possibility of Celie's lesbian desire. This desire is further suppressed by Celie's reaction to

Shug's betrayal. She is hurt, but instead of blaming Shug, she finds solace in feminine carework. Celie returns to what she did earlier in the book: caring for the sick.

Celie returns to Georgia to help care for Sofia's daughter who has sickle cell anemia. Mr.____ wants to get back together with Celie, but she tells him that she is not attracted to men sexually. "Take off they pants...and men look like frogs to me. No matter how you kiss 'em, as far as I'm concern, frogs is what they stay" (254). During this time, Celie emotionally connects with Mr.____ over their shared love of Shug. As Celie mourns losing Shug, she says "Mr.____ seem to be the only one who understand my feeling" (259). Here, even in betrayal, Shug continues to perform the role of the Magical Lesbian - she brings about reconciliation between Albert and Celie. Celie explains that she does not hate Mr.____ "for two reasons. One , he love Shug. And two, Shug use to love him" (260). Thus it is through Shug that Celie connects with Mr.____ as a friend. Mr.____ is also the only one really aware that Celie is a lesbian and he protects her. Celie notes that:

Sofia and Harpo always try to set me up with some man. They know I love Shug but they think womens love just be accident...Everytime I go to Harpo's some little policy salesman git all up in my face. Mr.____ have to come to the rescue. He tell the man, This lady my wife (260).

In a twist befitting Shug's navigation of heterosexual systems, Mr.____ uses his heterosexual male privilege to protect Celie's lesbian sexuality. Celie and Mr.____ talk with each other about the different things they love about Shug, and through this talking, begin to understand and comfort each other. Albert explains that the reciprocal carework between Shug and Celie is what made him realize he was losing his hold over Celie when he says, "when I looked around and the two of you was always doing each other's hair, I start to worry" (271). But now, he is willing to relate to Celie as an equal -- because of Shug. Albert says,

I'm real sorry she left you, Celie. I remember how I felt when she left me. Then the old devil put his arms around me and just stood there on the porch with me real quiet. Way after a while I bent my stiff neck onto his shoulder. Here us is, I thought, two old fools left over from love, keeping each other company under the stars (271).

In this passage, Celie evokes her first sexual experience with Shug with the "way after a while" quote and her bond with Shug with the "us." These two things signal ways that Mr.____ and Celie are now on a more level ground. Finally, Celie says of Mr.____ "He ain't Shug, but he begin to be somebody I can talk to" (276). Mr.____ even asks Celie to marry him again "in the spirit as well as in the flesh," but Celie refuses (283).

Shug's Embodied Rescuing, Caring, and Connection

When Celie was first married to Mr.____, her sister Nettie came to stay with them. Celie and Nettie were close, and Mr.____ sent Nettie away because she refused his sexual advances. Nettie and Celie promise to write, and the novel is composed of their letters to each other. However, Celie does not receive any letters from Nettie, as Mr.____ hides them. One of Shug's acts of embodied rescue is to retrieve the letters, which she does by flirting and returning to Mr.____'s bed. Once Shug has found the trunk where he hid the letters and returned them to Celie, Celie becomes so angry over Mr.____'s subterfuge that it throws her into a murderous rage. Shug sees Celie standing behind Mr.____ with an open razor; Shug stops her from killing him by laughing, then saying to Celie "I know I told you I need something to cut this hangnail with, but Albert git real niggerish bout his razor" (120). Shug navigates an intense situation in this moment. She saves Celie from cutting/killing Albert, which will ruin Celie's life, and she does it in a way that does not let Albert know Celie was planning to hurt him. Shug's use of the adjective "niggerish" fulfills a fantasy for Celie: it

cuts Albert down. Furthermore, Shug's use of a racial slur slashes back at Albert's sisters who have called Shug "too black." Once Shug has the razor, she puts Celie to bed and keeps her away from Albert. Here, Shug becomes caregiver and Celie the care-receiver.

Reciprocal relationships between Magical Lesbians and protagonists, when the Magical Lesbian both gives and receives care, occur primarily in African American fiction.²⁰

When Shug becomes Celie's caretaker, she shows Celie her own wound. This trend shows up in other texts, such as *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Thus part of Magical Lesbian caretaking entails a reveal, when the Magical Lesbian discloses her own unresolved past. In Shug's case, she explains to Celie how her love of sex and physical affection caused her exile from her family:

One thing my mama hated me for was how much I love to fuck, she say. She never love to do nothing had anything to do with touching nobody, she say. I try to kiss her, she turn her mouth away. Say, Cut that out...My daddy love me to kiss and hug him, but she didn't like the looks of that. So when I met Albert, and once I got into his arms, nothing could git me out (120 - 121).

Shug references lost affection and a broken relationship with her mother, but she finds refuge with her aunt. After Shug has her third baby, her parents kick her out and send her to live with her mother's sister, who also enjoys sex and challenges gender norms. Shug explains her aunt, "She drink, she fight, she love mens to death. She work in a roadhouse. Cook. Feed fifty men, screw fifty-five" (121). Celie remains numb as Shug talks, and Shug moves from the affection she could not get from her parents to how much she wanted to marry Albert and how shocked she was when he married someone else: "His daddy told him I'm trash, my mama trash before me" (121-122). Shug is denied affection from her

²⁰ *The Color Purple* is a prime example of this. Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents* (1998) features a Black protagonist and white Magical Lesbian who exchange caretaking; Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982) has a Magical Lesbian couple who share caregiving.

parents because of her mother's temperament and fear that Shug's father's affection will become sexual, then Shug is denied social legitimation for her love because of her sexual behavior and social class. It is in conjunction with carework in many of these texts that Magical Lesbians share their insights into their past, into their wounds, into their regrets. Why does this come when they are caring and not when they are being cared for? Is this a suggestion that these characters must earn their right to tell their stories by performing a service for the protagonist? Or are they offering up their wounds to the protagonist as a means to aid the protagonist's healing? Is revealing a wound an act of healing for the Magical Lesbian or for the protagonist?

In this scene, as Shug reveals herself to Celie, we learn that she craves social acceptance. Shug says:

when I come here...I treated you so mean. Like you was a servant. And all because Albert married you. And I didn't even want him for a husband...But just to choose me, you know, cause nature had already done it. Nature said, You two folks, hook up, cause you a good example of how it sposed to go. I didn't want nothing to be able to go against that. But what was good tween us must have been nothing but bodies...Cause I don't know the Albert that don't dance, can't hardly laugh, never talk bout nothing, beat you and hid your sister Nettie's letters (123).

Remember, when Shug arrived, it was Celie's carework that changed her mind about Celie, but in this passage Shug expresses both her longing for the social acceptance of marriage, feminine passivity (she wants to be "chosen" by Albert), and a conflict between nature, sexual desire, and the social order.²¹ Yet here, Shug reveals that her feelings about Albert have changed because of Celie. We will see later that it is only Shug's feelings for Albert that have changed but not her longing for heterosexual marriage. This pull is so strong that even

²¹ Walker uses the conflict between Albert and Shug over marriage to show how patriarchy leads to male subordination as well. Due to the patriarchal power of his father, Albert cannot choose to marry Shug.

after Shug provided Celie with economic and sexual options outside of compulsory heterosexuality, both Shug and Celie still respond to and interact with the institution of heterosexual marriage.

After Celie receives Nettie's letters, she loses her sexual responsiveness to Shug. "Us sleep like sisters, me and Shug. Much as I still want to be with her, much as I love to look, my titties stay soft, my little button never rise" (146). Shug assures Celie that this is grief and that "wanting to kill somebody will make you feel this way. Nothing to worry about. Titties gonna perk up, button gonna rise again" (146). Shug then suggests that Celie make herself some pants because "you don't have a dress do nothing for you. You not made like no dress pattern, neither" (146). In encouraging Celie to find something to do, Shug also urges her to transgress gender norms. And once Celie starts sewing, she thinks "A needle and not a razor in my hand" (147). Thus it is feminized labor that works Celie out of her grief, and we see a transformative aspect of caring for the self. With Shug's encouragement, Celie invests in carework for herself, and is ultimately rewarded with spiritual healing and economic independence. I argue that we should read Walker's choice as suggesting that caring labor must be carefully spent for women to maintain creative and sexual vitality. Like sexual energy, caring energy is limited. While Celie is healing, she loses interest in sex. Shug continues to offer Celie non-sexual affection such as hugging and snuggling. Where has Shug's desire gone? She and Albert are no longer lovers. It appears that her desire is subjugated according to Celie's needs.

Shug's facilitating of Celie's access to Nettie's letters not only connects Celie to Nettie, but also clarifies her family relations, a theme I will return to in Chapter Four, when discussing Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*. When Celie discovers that the man she thought was her

father is not her biological father, Celie realizes that her children are not her siblings, but only her children (177). At this moment, when Celie "feels daze," Shug says she's taking her back to Tennessee. But before Celie leaves, she decides to go see her stepfather. She and Shug dress in pants and matching hats and go out to see Celie's stepfather where Shug helps Celie find out where her biological parents are buried (178; 182). When they get there, they cannot find the grave. Shug says to Celie "Us each other's peoples now" then kisses her (183). This is an interesting repetition of what Celie's stepfather says earlier when Celie and Shug question him about his new fifteen-year-old wife. Shug says to her, "I'm surprise your people let you marry" (181). Celie's stepfather replies, "I'm her people now" (181). Shug's repetition and twist on the phrase shifts the idea of ownership that Celie's stepfather expresses over his wife into a mutual agreement. Celie and Shug are each other's people.

After Celie finds out the truth about her past, she stops writing letters to God. Shug makes sure that Celie maintains her spirituality. When Celie explains that God has done her wrong and says "What God do for me?" Shug replies, "He gave you life, good health, and a good woman that love you to death" (192). Here Shug paves the way for a spirituality that accepts queerness. But Celie resists, arguing, "the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown" (192). Shug responds by pointing out the male dominance and racism in the Black church, as well as the complicity of the Black church in the white washing of Christianity in this process.

Nettie say somewhere in the bible it say Jesus' hair was like lamb's wool, I say. Well, say Shug, if he came to any of these churches we talking bout he'd have to have it conked before anybody paid him any attention. The last thing niggers want to think about they God is that his hair kinky...Ain't no way to read the bible and not think God white (195).

Here Shug holds both spirituality and race. She then moves Celie away from the image of God as a white man and as gendered: "God ain't a he or a she, but a It" (195) and towards a God found in nature. Shug says, "My first step away from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people...that feeling of being part of everything not separate at all" (196). Here is another positive image of trees that evokes Celie's original defense mechanism - becoming like a tree - and transforms it into a means to access a new spirituality. When Mr. ____ beats Celie she, "make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie you a tree" (22). Thus Shug has taken a symbol Celie used to escape and endure trauma and turned into a means to connect to spirituality. Shug then argues that patriarchy has caused people to view God as gendered and male:

Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God (197).

Shug not only identifies how cultural images of men are intertwined with patriarchal religion, but she also offers Celie a means to fight this indoctrination - with natural imagery.

After Shug gives Celie an internal spiritual makeover, she performs the ultimate act of Magical Lesbian rescue: she takes Celie away from Albert and Celie finds the courage to stand up to him. When Shug says "Us leaving," her husband, Grady, thinks that she means just the two of them, but Shug explains, "Celie is coming with us" (199). The first "us leaving," I believe, refers to Shug and Celie - not Shug and Grady, the "us" evoking Shug's claim to Celie that, "us each others peoples now" (183). That 'us' was a rewriting of Celie's stepfather's patriarchal claim over both Celie and his child-bride. When Shug tell Albert "us leaving," she references the "us" from Celie's confrontation with her father. The 'us' from the confrontation with Celie's stepfather was a signal of victory over Celie's past, while the

"us" Shug utters to Albert represents victory over Celie's present. It is Shug who makes this distinction. Shug does not say, "I'm" taking Celie away or "I'm your people now" as the "I" has been linked to unequal power in patriarchal relationships. Instead the "us" is a celebration of feminine equality. As Alice Walker explains in the documentary "Alice Walker: Beauty in Truth," she thought only Shug would be able to see Celie, as men would overlook her. Shug's use of "us" indicates she values Celie and sees her. And in seeing Celie, Shug becomes disillusioned with Albert. His cruelty towards Celie disappoints Shug to the point that she stops finding him sexually attractive. This speaks to the reciprocity of caring occurring between Celie and Shug; each of them grows and benefits through caring from the other. Again, Walker is not condemning gendered caring, but offering a means to recycle that energy between women so that it is mutually beneficial. Instead of caring exploiting Shug and Celie, it transforms them both. This is a sharp contrast from Celie's lack of affections towards Albert's children and Shug's disdainful treatment of Celie when she first meets her.

Being aligned with Shug gives Celie the strength to stand up to Albert. Shug initiates Celie's empowerment during a Sunday dinner, while many of Celie's community are present. By making her rescue public, Shug offers Celie a chance to stand up for herself where others can bear witness. When Albert protests Celie leaving, and says, "Over my dead body" (199) Celie says, " It's time to leave you and enter into the Creation. And your dead body just the welcome mat I need" (199). Celie refers to escaping Albert as entering into "the Creation" which suggests a movement into the new spirituality Shug has provided Celie. During this scene, as Celie confronts Albert about hiding Nettie's letters, she also takes on his son Harpo, who, when she first came to live with Albert threw a rock at her

head. Critics such as bell hooks have criticized Walker for what happens to Sofia in this novel - they argue that her blinding, imprisonment, and subsequent slavery with the white mayor's family was an unjust punishment of the only "strong black woman" in the text. Yet they leave out this scene, where Celie puts the blame on Harpo for what happened to Sofia, saying to him, "If you hadn't tried to rule over Sofia the white folks never would have caught her" (200). Sofia confirms Celie's assessment of what happened to her. So in this moment, as Shug's use of "us" has unleashed Celie's strength, Celie points to misogyny, specifically Harpo's belief that he should be in control of his wife, as putting Sofia at risk to experience more racism. Rather than Walker punishing a "strong Black woman," as critics have suggested, Walker is showing how Black patriarchy puts Black women at risk. Harpo's conflict with Sofia has been that she won't mind him like Celie obeys Albert; when Sofia is stuck in jail, she tells Celie she survives by pretending to be her. This link between a private patriarchal structure of oppression within the Black family and the racist institution of the jail fits with Alice Walker's claim that black men have both the slave master and slave within them ("Beauty in Truth"). Perhaps critics struggle with Sofia's fate because it is an uncomfortable link between Black male gender privilege and white racism.

Caring, Desire, Gender Performativity, and the Senses

Alice Walker writes in the intro to the 2011 electronic edition of *The Color Purple*, of "the book's intent: to explore the difficult path of someone who starts out in life already a spiritual captive, but who, through her own courage and the help of others, breaks free" (preface). Walker focuses on Celie, the protagonist, and her journey; Shug, (the one who rescues Celie) is contained within the statement "the help of others." While Shug herself

has a difficult path, she is "othered" by Walker, even though it is her caring labor that makes Celie's journey and healing possible. However, I want to highlight the way in which Shug's caring and gender performativity demonstrate the relationship of the senses of touch and sight to desire and social acceptability.

Shug uses gender performativity as a means of resisting sexism and patriarchy. While Shug recovers from illness at Mr.____'s and Celie's house, Mr.____'s brother Tobias comes to visit. During Tobias's visit, Shug wanders out to the sitting room and asks Celie to teach her how to sew. As Shug and Tobias trade barbs, Shug says "All womens not alike, Tobias" (57). Tobias responds that he believes Shug but he "can't prove it to the world" (57). Celie responds to this by feeling content as she "quilting tween Shug Avery and Mr.____. Us three set together against Tobias...For the first time in my life, I feel just right" (57). Again, Shug provides a connection between Mr.____ and Celie and protection from the traditional gender norms that Tobias represents even as she is learning the feminine task of sewing. Thus once again, Shug disidentifies and transgresses femininity. As she learns to sew, Shug challenges Tobias who claims there is no way to prove that women are individuals and not just a category. Shug therefore transforms the performance of sewing because she picks up a needle in the context of arguing for women as human individuals rather than a monolithic group. Sewing is still connected with femininity, but this is a disidentified femininity, one that is being reconstructed as powerful and unique. Sewing is furthermore an embodied practice in the text, marking it as a concrete reclaiming and reimagining of femininity.

While the image and anticipation of Shug have been an inspiration and a salve, Celie's first meeting with the actual Shug connects Shug with death while simultaneously

awakening Celie's senses. Celie looks at the picture of Shug and thinks "she be dressed to kill" (6) and the first time she sees Shug, Celie thinks "she dress to kill" (45). Shug's connection with death suggests a transformation to come. Also, the only time Shug passively receives is when she is sick. Shug will later repay Celie's kindness, which confirms Patricia Hill-Collins's idea of a black feminist "ethic of caring." She describes this ethic as, "the value placed on individual expressiveness, the appropriateness of emotions, and the capacity for empathy" (216). As Shug's body enters the text, both the "ethic of caring" and Celie's desire for Shug wakes Celie up from her wooden state: "I think my heart gon fly out my mouth when I see one of her foots come poking out... Come on in, With God help, Celie going to make you well" (45). Here, Celie's pounding heart signifies her desire for Shug while the words she never speaks (Come on in) speak to the ethic of caring. Shug's first words are harsh: "she cackle. Sound like a death rattle You sure *is* ugly, she say" (46). Shug shifts from an idealized image to a sick, angry body. Celie notes that Shug is "sicker than anybody I ever seen. She sicker than my mama when she die. But she more evil than my mama and that keep her alive" (47). In this moment, Celie marks Shug's "evil" as positive: it is keeping her alive.

It is through caring that Celie's desire for Shug grows. As Celie bathes Shug she thinks, "first time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it black plum nipples, look like her mouth, I thought I had turned into a man" (49). Here is a place where a Magical Lesbian destabilizes feminine norms of desire by highlighting the performativity of gender. Judith Butler argues that gender is a "social temporality" and "a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief" (179). For Butler, gender is not

moored to biology, but to behavior and social beliefs about particular behaviors. Celie thinking that she has turned into a man as she engages in feminine caretaking shows her containing multiple subjectivities and desires. Celie shows us masculine desire performed through femininity. Mr.____ has refused to bathe Shug which Celie finds remarkable as “they have three babies together but he squeamish bout giving her a bath” which marks feminine caring as not sexual enough (49). Seeing Shug's body in the context of feminized caretaking allows Celie to experience masculine desire through femininity. It is feminized caretaking that evokes Celie's masculine desire; thus caring is the vector through which Celie gets to experience the flexibility of her positionality.

Even as Shug awakens Celie's desire, she connects Celie to Mr.____. After Celie gets Shug to eat something, Mr.____ asks Celie about it and laughs when Celie says, "Nobody living can stand to smell home cured ham without tasting it" (52). Mr.____'s laugh suggests he is having a moment of respecting Celie and his questions suggest his wonder at her caregiving abilities. Many of the moments when Mr.____ recognizes Celie as a person and not property come as a result of Shug. On the other hand, Shug initially treats Celie similarly to Mr.____. She calls Celie ugly and accepts Celie's caretaking without gratitude. (Celie remains enamored despite this). It is when Celie does Shug's hair that this shifts. At first Shug says, "hurry up and git finish" (53), but "then she melt down a little and lean back against my knees" (53). Finally Shug starts humming a song which Celie thinks is “low down dirty...Like what a preacher tells you its a sin to hear” and tells Celie that she "help scratch out of my head" (53). Once again, Shug connects Celie to desire, and helps her recognize church's teachings against desire. Celie thinks a preacher would find Shug's song a sin; Celie herself enjoys the song and Shug, who has been sick and mean since she arrived,

softens. This moment in the text is a transformative one, as Celie's caring is openly recognized as valuable. Caring and valuing caring are ways Magical Lesbians destabilize heterosexual carework systems. Shug's appreciation for Celie's caring is contrasted by both Shug's previous behavior and Mr.____'s sense of entitlement to Celie's caring labor. Before Shug, Celie's caring is used by her step-father to convince Mr.____ to marry Celie. "She ugly. He say. But she ain't no stranger to hard work" (8). Celie's step-father offers Celie's caring as consolation for her ugliness and unfeminine appearance; even Mr.____'s sisters note that Celie takes better care of the house than Mr.____'s ex-wife. However, the sisters are not appreciating Celie's caring; they are noting it to mark her as feminine, as their comment takes place in the context of policing Shug's sexual behavior as unfeminine and of policing Mr.____'s ex-wife as unfeminine because of her housekeeping.

To openly value Celie's care is to call into question the naturalness of feminine caretaking. In other words, Shug's appreciation and respect for Celie's caretaking brings caring to the forefront of the scene. Shug highlights the ignored -- but expected -- background labor of caring and in doing so, shifts the gendered expectations associated with caring. Misra explains that caretaking is ignored because it is assumed "that such universal nonmarket work is effortlessly and altruistically produced and does not require further exploration" (387). Shug's respect for Celie's labor highlights an imbalance in the heteronormative model of caring in which women produce caring labor for households because caring is innately feminine. Shug further complicates heteronormative assumptions about caring by evoking Celie's sexual desires as she appreciates Celie's caring.

Caring also provides Celie with a means to experience her own desires. Through conversations with other characters, Celie realizes the effect caring for Shug is having on her. When talking to Sofia about sex with men, Celie thinks to herself, "Only time I feel something stirring down there is when I think bout Shug" (65). This connection to desire continues as Shug starts to sing at Harpo's juke joint. Mr.____ doesn't want Celie to go Shug's first show. Shug uses her need for carework to bargain with Mr.____ to release Celie. In other words, Shug makes use of male/class privilege to speak a language Mr.____ understands. Thus Shug manages to protect Celie and connect her to her desire and the outside world at the same time. When Mr.____ says, "Wives don't go to places like that" (72), Shug replies "Spose I git sick while I'm singing...spose my dress come undone?" (72). Mr.____ continues to mutter about what his wife can't do. Again, Shug reifies the idea that Celie is Mr.____'s property by requesting Celie attend her show to do carework as she challenges Mr.____'s idea of wives as property by saying "Good thing I ain't your damn wife" (72). In this series of scenes Shug uses feminine carework as the rationale for why Celie should come to her show, thus cementing the othering of carework and its association with the oppressed feminine and oppressed classes. Celie does not get to go hear Shug sing because she wants to - Mr.____ releases her into an imagined servitude for Shug. Secondly, Shug honors carework by crediting Celie's caring with the origins of her new song. On the one hand, Shug protects carework as belonging to the othered realm of the feminine; on the other hand, she notes that receiving carework aids creativity. Thus she simultaneously confirms the status quo of carework as she challenges it. This is the razor's edge that Magical Lesbian characters walk: they protect the status quo as they repair individual women from the damage it causes. They point out the problems in the system; for example,

when Shug says "good thing I ain't your damn wife," she rejects the patriarchal control of marriage for herself, yet Shug and other Magical Lesbians also use this same system to liberate other women.

As Shug connects Celie to the pleasures of her female body, Shug dissolves the boundaries between some gender norms. One night at Harpo's Juke Joint:

Shug say, Girl, you look like a good time, you do.
That when I notice how Shug talk and act sometimes like a man. Men say stuff like that to women, Girl you look like a good time. Women always talk about hair and health. How many babies living or dead, or got teef. Not bout how some woman they hugging on look like a good time (81).

But right after Shug has shifted gender norms with her behavior, Celie notices that, "All the men got they eyes glued on Shug's bosom. I got my eyes glued there too" (81). Here Shug's femininity is affirmed by her body, even as she performs masculinity, while at the same time Celie connects her desire for Shug to the men in the room, thus once again highlighting gender performativity. Both Celie and Shug perform masculinity: Shug through language and Celie through desire; thus, the text calls into question essentialized notions of gender and heteronormativity itself. Masculine and feminine become performative acts, confirming Butler's claim in *Gender Trouble* that male and female are unstable identities. As heterosexual desire depends upon this binary opposition between male and female, this scene destabilizes the heterosexual desire. If both Shug and Celie can perform heterosexuality, while desiring each other, heterosexuality loses its separation from homosexuality. However, I argue that the text's separation of looking as evoking desire and touch as comforting and non-sensual functions to contains Magical Lesbian transgressions and prevent the destabilization of gender norms from overtaking the text.

As Shug enters and exits the narrative, she also moves between different types of gender performativity. Shug leaves for Memphis, then Celie reveals that Shug is coming back for Christmas with "a big surprise" (107). This big surprise turns out to be a new marriage. She hugs Celie and says, "Us two married ladies now" (108). So Shug, even as she cultivates sexual desire in others and helps Celie find her sexual freedom is drawn to marriage. Once again, this reifies traditional femininity and separates Shug from the Siren/Jezebel stereotype. Together, Shug and Celie performing the carework for Albert and Grady: "Me and Shug cook, talk, clean the house, talk, fix up the tree, talk, wake up in the morning, talk" (109). This caring labor bonds the two of them. However, even though heterosexual marriage is so important to Shug, she continues to play with gender. When Shug tells the story of how she met her husband Grady, Celie mentions that Albert is upset. Shug tells Celie that finding out Albert beat her changed Shug's feeling about him, and Shug tells Celie, "If you was my wife, she say, I'd cover you up with kisses stead of licks, and work hard for you too" (109). Here, Shug plays with the contextuality and performativity of heterosexual marriage. She both associates masculinity with physical abuse and simultaneously redeems it. By saying she will cover Celie with kisses instead of licks, Shug acknowledges the abuse Celie suffers within her marriage and performs masculinity through femininity. As Shug is still the one covering Celie, albeit with kisses, she is performing masculinity in a feminine manner. Finally, Shug plays even more with masculinity by saying she will work hard for Celie. Shug protects Celie from Albert and makes him stop beating Celie, thus exposing a problem with marriage – male control over women -- and she offers a playful solution to the problem of masculinity being associated with control. Shug suggests that performing masculinity through femininity is a way to

separate masculinity from oppressive behaviors towards women. Shug's fluid approach to heterosexual marriage dissolves gender boundaries for not just Celie, but for Mr.____ as well. Furthermore, Shug's rescue of Celie ends up changing Mr.____ from being an oppressive wife beater to a man who talks to Celie as an equal, sews, and enters into a business relationship with Celie. It is important to note that the absence of Shug and Celie's bodies is what Mr.____ credits with his transformation.

Shug removes her body from Mr.____ in stages, first leaving his bed, then leaving his home, then taking his wife away. Yet while present, Shug most often uses touch to soothe rather than titillate. When Shug hears that Albert beats Celie, she "put her arms around" Celie and they sit like this for a half hour (75). Shug tells Celie "I won't leave, until I know Albert won't even think about beating you" (75). Shug's comforting gesture does not stir Celie's desire; instead Celie's desire emerges when she is looking at Shug rather than touching her. Only once in the text does Shug's touch become erotic. The fact that looking is arousing while touching is comforting suggests an objectified lesbian sexuality. This is a theme that is repeated in other texts: queer woman use their bodies to provide non-erotic comfort. This pattern of the lesbian gaze as arousing but lesbian touch as comforting and non-sexual separates touch from sexual desire while it cements vision as key to it. This focus on sight as arousing reproduces the male gaze in suggesting that lesbians are sensual as objects but not as subjects. It suggests a cultural discomfort with lesbian desire as desiring lesbians (seeing them) replaces lesbian desire. This suggestion that lesbian touch is not sensual is repeated in other mainstream North American texts as lesbian sex is often describes as "safe." Perhaps what is safe is the absence of the sense of touch from many

lesbian sex scenes. Authors summarize sexual experiences into brief sentences such as "safe" "tender" "comforting," instead of showing them.

Secondary Pleasure

While there are few scenes in the novel of Shug experiencing sexual pleasure, Shug often discusses the importance of pleasure. There is another separation here -- Shug talks about enjoying sex but does not embody this enjoyment. While Shug represents sexual pleasure, her interactions with it are disembodied. Thus Shug's experiences of sexual pleasure become for and about Celie rather than about Shug herself. In other words, when Shug retells experiences of sexual pleasure, this pleasure enables Celie's personal, spiritual, and sexual growth. Yet even within this dichotomy, Shug demonstrates a model of relating to Celie's husband that is focused on women's pleasure. Shug asks Celie if she minds if she sleeps with her husband. Celie does mind - but she doesn't tell Shug that. Celie asks if Shug loves Albert and she replies, "I got what you call a passion for him," then lists Albert's good and bad traits (76). Here the focus is on Shug's pleasure and whether or not this pleasure causes Celie pain. Later in the conversation, Shug finds out that Celie has never enjoyed sex. Shug then declares that Celie is "still a virgin" (77), instructs her on how to find her clitoris, then gives Celie a mirror so she can look at her vulva. Shug guards the door while Celie looks at herself. Here, Shug connects Celie to her own body, while protecting her while she does it. This moment, with Shug standing outside the door so Celie can explore her own body, marks Shug as both one who connects Celie to her own sexual desire and protects her (78). Even as Shug's body protects Celie's sexual self-discovery, in which Celie discovers

her right to subjectivity, male gazes sexualize Shug's body and she is rarely presented as a sexual subject.

After Shug leaves and returns to Georgia with a husband, she asks Celie whether she has experienced sexual pleasure yet. Though Mr.____ has tried to arouse Celie, it hasn't worked. Here it becomes clear that while Shug facilitates an emotional connection between Mr.____ and Celie, she does not facilitate a sexual one. Instead, Celie's sexual pleasure remains moored to Shug. When Grady (Shug's new husband) and Albert take off for the night, Shug crawls into bed with Celie, claiming she is cold without Grady. While they lie in bed, Shug inquires about Celie's past sexual experiences. When Celie tells Shug about her abuse, Shug puts her arms around Celie (112). Encased in Shug's arms, Celie "cry and cry and cry. Seem like it all come back to me, laying there in Shug arms. How it hurt...How the blood drip down my leg and mess up my stocking" (112). In this moment, Shug connects Celie to her repressed anguish and hurt and uses her body to contain these feelings for Celie. When Celie says, "Nobody ever love me" (112) Shug says, "I love you, Miss Celie" then kisses Celie on the mouth (113). After the kiss, Celie "feels something real soft and wet on my breast, feel like one of my little lost babies mouth. Way after while, I act like a little lost baby too" (113). From this, we can surmise that Celie has experienced orgasm. It is interesting that Walker uses mother/child dyad metaphors to write a lesbian sex scene. This scene is one of the few times a Magical Lesbian character is shown having sex. Celie uses her first person narration in this scene to focus on sexual pleasure while describing it in terms of mother/child relationship. First, Celie is the mother experiencing Shug's mouth on her breast, but then as Celie orgasms, she becomes a "little lost baby too" (113), thus making both Shug and Celie lost babies. Given the mainstream literature that follows this

where lesbians care for children and use their physical affection to comfort in non-sexual ways, Walker's allusion of sex to the mother/child dyad foresees a price of admission for lesbians into mainstream texts. In later chapters, I argue that secondary lesbian characters in mainstream texts must give up their sensuality/eroticism in exchange for being seen as suitable substitute parents. While Shug does not perform the role of substitute parent in this scene, the metaphors for describing erotic pleasure in the scene focus on mothers and babies. Celie's connection to sexual pleasure comes through metaphors and connections to motherhood, as when Celie, at Shug's insistence, first touches her own clitoris "A little shiver go through me" then looks at her own breasts "I haul up my dress and look at my titties. Think bout my babies sucking them. Remember the little shiver I felt then too. Sometimes a big shiver. Best part about having the babies was feeding 'em" (78). Here, motherhood meshes with sensuality and breast-feeding appears not just as selfless giving but as something that brings Celie the only sexual pleasure she has ever felt. In terms of the text, it then makes sense that Celie would describe her first orgasm in the context of breast-feeding.

Even after Shug and Celie have sex, it comes back to the female familial relationships for Celie: "Me and Shug sound asleep. What it like? Little like sleeping with mama, only I can't hardly remember sleeping with her. Little like sleeping with Nettie, only sleeping with Nettie never feel this good...It feel like heaven is what it feel like, not like sleeping with Mr.__ at all" (114). Yet when Shug's husband tries to evoke these same connections by calling Shug "mama," Shug replies, "I ain't your fucking mama" (114). When Shug puts the word fucking next to mama she demarks her relationship with Grady as off the continuum of female affection. Shug and Celie inhabit this continuum by sleeping together in bed, but

Walker does not show them being erotic again. Instead, they talk, and Shug uses these conversations to facilitate more connections for Celie. When Shug starts asking about Celie's sister, Nettie, she realizes that Mr.____ has been hiding Nettie's letters. Shug then uses Albert's sexual interest in her to get access to Nettie's letters (118 - 119). Thus Shug connects Celie back to her family, which is what Magical Lesbians do. Already we've seen that Shug has connected Celie and Albert, but now, we see Shug connecting Celie to what she really wants: her sister. Magical Lesbians often connect characters to their deepest, and unexpressed desires.²² Celie's lack of sexual pleasure has not been on her mind until Shug drew attention to it, but she has been longing for her sister the whole text.

Celie and Shug's sexual encounter happens when they are both, as Shug says, "two married ladies." Their lesbian desire is protected by heterosexual marriage, thus bell hooks' reading of the text -- that there are no consequences for lesbianism -- is not quite accurate. The only visible lesbian sexual encounter in the text occurs within the context of heterosexual marriage and ends as soon as the men return from their night out. Even when Shug takes Celie away from Albert, she does it in a way that her relationship with Celie can continue without her husband, Grady, interfering. Shug both contains and protects the erotic attraction between Celie and herself. As Shug announces during a Sunday dinner that she and Celie are leaving: "Somebody else going with us too. No use in Celie being the only one taking the weight" (202). Another minor woman character, Mary Agnes, joins them and is rescued and connected to what she really wants to do: sing. But as Mary Agnes is rescued, she also serves a protective purpose for Shug and Celie. Mary Agnes distracts

²² The pinnacle of this is in Jodi Picoult's *Sing You Home* (2011) where the magical Lesbian carries an embryo for the protagonist.

Shug's husband Grady. Shug has early noticed Grady "making eyes" at Mary Agnes, and, by bringing Mary Agnes to Memphis, Shug will now have access to a relationship with Celie.

Once they get to Memphis, Celie notes that Shug's house is "big and pink" (208). Again, the pink anchors Shug's physicality in a deviant femininity and permissive sexuality, as pink shack is a synonym for a whorehouse. Shug gives Celie her own room and the caring begins in earnest. As Celie says, "Nobody cook like Shug when she cook" (209). After eating, "Shug and me go fall out in her room...It cool and dark in her room. Her bed soft and nice. Us lay with our arms around each other. Sometimes Shug read the paper out loud" (210). While there is physical contact, the two of them are not shown having erotic contact. Their lesbianism becomes a place of caring, of healing, of empowering Celie, but there is no more talk of pleasing God by experiencing sexual pleasure. If anything, their arrangement evokes a Boston Marriage. As Celie is away from Albert, and Mary Agnes distracts Grady, Shug and Celie are free to continue exploring their erotic connection, but instead they cuddle and read the newspaper. I am not arguing that there is no implied sexual intimacy between Shug and Celie, but this differs from representations in this text of heterosexual sexuality. Whether pleasurable or rape, it is clear when sexual encounters happen between men and women in the text. Portraying lesbian sex with innuendo framed with soft touches and cuddling has two main effects. One, it is a form of closeting and two; it misrepresents the unique risks and vulnerability of same-sex eroticism.

Protecting Motherhood from Lesbian Desire

Even though Celie's metaphors for experiencing sexual pleasure come from the mother/child dyad, the act of mothering is temporally and geographically divorced from lesbian desire and sensuality. In other words, when secondary lesbian characters care for

children during the day, they do not experience sexual pleasure at night, after their childcare duties are done for the day. There are no young children in Celie's household when Shug comes to stay, but strictures against women's sexual pleasure and childcare come through in *The Color Purple*. Shug does not have contact with her own children because they have been taken away from her because she has too much sex. When Shug finally seeks out her biological children, she has strayed away from Celie. Thus even as *The Color Purple* breaks through the homophobic separation of lesbian eroticism and lesbian parenting (meaning lesbians are presented only as suitable adoptive parents when they are not ever shown being erotic with other adult women), Shug sets the stage for this price of inclusion as she avoids her own children until she has a boyfriend.

When we first learn about Shug's separation from her children, Celie is bathing Shug. Shug initially presents her separation from her children as her personal choice: "my kids with they grandma...She could stand the kids, I had to go" (50). But, later we find out Shug was exiled from her mother's home because of her sexual behavior. There is something important being protected here. As Shug is away from her children, it is safe for her to awaken Celie's desire. Shug's character protects motherhood and lesbian desire from co-existing in one body at the same time. This pattern of separation between lesbian desire and motherhood plays out in two ways in other novels from this time period. In novels such as Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* (1992), Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents* (1998), Anna Quindlen's *One True Thing* (1994), Magical Lesbian adoptive mothers only mother as single women. They are distinguished from other characters as having had lesbian sexual relationships, yet they do not partake in these relationships when they are adoptive mothers. A second pattern emerges in the early 21st century in which lesbians

mother in the context of de-sexualized partnerships. Wally Lamb's *We Are Water* (2013) is an excellent example of this, as the sex acts of the straight-turned-lesbian protagonist are vividly described when they involve men; her sex with women is describe as "safe." Jodi Picoult's *Sing You Home* (2011), Ann Patchett's *The Magician's Assistant* (1997), Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag* (2010) all feature same-sex couples raising children, with little eroticism found in the scenes when couples are alone. In Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*, the lesbian couple has no physical contact in the text. Shug functions as a prototype and foreshadowing of the further separation between motherhood and lesbian eroticism in North American fiction. This separation hints that lesbian desire is dangerous and uncontrollable; in other words, secondary lesbian characters contain the insatiable parts of female sexual appetite and keep it temporally and geographically separate from mothering in a way that differs from temporal and geographical separations of children from heterosexual parents. This separation of lesbian desire from motherhood evokes old tropes of both lesbian sexuality as predatory and women's sexuality as uncontrollable. Lillian Faderman notes in her discussion of the trope of lesbians presented as dangerous and evil, as "carnivorous flowers" in literature, that one of the earliest representations of this trope by Balzac presents lesbians as child predators in *The Girl with the Golden Eye* ("Chloe" 294).

²³ Furthermore, this representation of lesbian sexuality as dangerous in contemporary North American fiction evokes late Nineteenth century and early Twentieth century strictures that women schoolteachers must remain unmarried virgins and be fired once they were married.

²³ However, Shug and Celie are both still mothers, thus adult women's sexual caring is separated from childcare.

Shug and Men

Shug's complicated relationship to marriage and sexual relationships with men serves to contain lesbian desire within the text. When Shug seeks out her children after she has left Celie for a younger man, she tells Celie, "Me and Germaine staying ended up in Tucson, Arizona where one of my children live. The other two alive and turned out well but they don't want to see me. Somebody told them I lives a evil life" (267). As Celie receives Shug's letters, she comes up with an alternate to monogamous love. Though Celie is deeply hurt and upset that Shug hasn't come back, she says, "Shug got a right to live too...Just cause I love her don't take away none of her rights...Who am I to tell her who to love? My job just to love her good and true myself" (269). Here, Celie challenges the possessive love she has seen from Mr. _____. Yet Celie's easy forgiveness of Shug also makes Celie's lesbian desire for Shug palatable for mainstream audiences. If Celie is not really mad at Shug for leaving her, but instead grateful for the wisdom she received, lesbian desire appears safe for the heteropatriarchy. Even from afar, Shug continues to play the role of Magical Lesbian: when she finds out that Celie received a telegram saying Nettie's ship went down, Shug goes to the state department to try to find out what happened.

When Shug finally returns, it is to Celie *and* Albert. While Shug tells Celie "I missed you more than I missed my own mama" (283), she is also worried that Celie and Albert have formed a couple and left her behind. Once Celie tells Shug that she and Albert talked about how much they loved her, "She smile, come put her head on my breast. Let out a long breath" (284). Once again, Shug's desire is encoded with metaphors of mothering. And for the rest of the novel, Shug is safely ensconced with Celie and Albert. While it is suggested that Shug has come back home to Celie, every other appearance she makes in the final

pages of the novel is in conjunction with Albert. When Nettie arrives because her ship was not lost after all, Celie introduces Nettie to both Shug and Albert: "I point up at my peoples. This Shug and Albert" (287). In the end of the book, Celie wonders how her children see the older generation and writes, "I see they [her children] think me and Nettie and Shug and Albert and Samuel and Harpo and Sofia and Jack and Odessa real old" (288). Again, in this last sentence Shug appears with "and Albert." To me, this ends the book with the Magical Lesbian being folded into heterosexuality. Even Celie herself, who has sworn off men as sexual partners, no longer writes about "me and Shug" or "us." Though it is clear Celie will not be having any more sexual relationships with men, it is not certain what will happen with Shug. Celie loves her but has let go. When Celie was waiting to see if Shug will come back to Georgia she says, "If she come, I be happy. If she don't, I be content. And then I figure this the lesson I was suppose to learn" (283). Thus Shug's behavior is not about pleasing herself so much as it is to enlighten Celie, further masking lesbian desire.

Conclusion

Throughout *The Color Purple*, Shug fulfills Celie's deepest longings. Celie wants to communicate with her sister; Shug discovers where Celie's husband has been hiding her sister's correspondence. Before Celie meets Shug, her response to her childhood and adult rapes is to disconnect herself from her body. She describes herself "like a tree" (17). Through a sexual encounter, Shug brings Celie back to the physical sensations of the past and then returns her to the present with an orgasm. Furthermore, as a Magical Lesbian, Shug holds the key to biological family relationships. Assisted by Shug, Celie confronts her childhood abuser and finds out that he is not her biological father. This knowledge gives

her the freedom to claim a new family, be recognized and respected by her community, and to open her own business.

Alice Walker's Shug Avery shows ways that systems of representation in North America cast secondary characters into roles in which they are othered and used to support the status quo. James Baldwin refers to a "price of the ticket" for African Americans to be admitted into literature; I argue that part of this ticket price in *The Color Purple* is showing lesbian desire as compatible with heterosexual families and relationships. Shug Avery is a Magical Lesbian because she evokes Celie's lesbian desire, then masks and contains that very desire. Furthermore, Shug Avery sets the stage for the secondary lesbian characters that follow in North American literature. Walker puts more lesbian eroticism in *The Color Purple* than we will see in the rest of this dissertation. Shug's one scene of sex with Celie and her time cuddling is some of the rare physical contact found between lesbians in mainstream North American texts. However, the erotic moments between Shug and Celie are contained within metaphors of mothering, which I argue sets the stage for Magical Lesbian roles in later texts. Secondary lesbian characters appear in the other texts I analyze primarily as adoptive mothers. The de-eroticization of lesbianism that begins with Walker's *The Color Purple* continues into the late 20th century. In the chapters that follow I explore how de-erotic white and Native American secondary lesbians are presented as suitable adoptive mothers for children born to heterosexual parents.

CHAPTER THREE

TEMPORALITY AND MAGICAL LESBIANS: AUNT RAYLENE FROM DOROTHY ALLISON'S *BASTARD OUT OF CAROLINA* AND THE DIALECTIC-DIALOGIC

Introduction

Published in 1992, Dorothy Allison's novel *Bastard Out of Carolina* chronicles Ruth-Anne Boatwright's brutal coming of age. Ruth-Anne, known as Bone to her family, is beaten, molested and finally raped by her stepfather, Glen Waddell. Bone's mother, Anney, tries to leave Glen three times, but Glen resorts to emotional manipulation and suicide threats to ensnare Anney. Throughout this period of parental neglect, Bone is cared for by her lesbian aunt Raylene. With *Bastard Out of Carolina* we move into one of the primary roles of the Magical Lesbian (ML) in contemporary literature: the role of substitute mother. As I demonstrated in the last chapter, secondary characters like Shug Avery from *The Color Purple* function as magical actors that both challenge and reproduce heteronormative familial structures within narratives. Here, *Bastard Out of Carolina's* Aunt Raylene confounds monolithic ideas about homosexual identity while she intervenes and complicates queer theories of reproductive futurity.

In this chapter, I use anthropological definitions of the ways that time is socially and culturally constructed, and engage with work on queer temporality and futurity to theorize how temporality interacts with Raylene's feminized carework. Despite having no children of her own, Raylene acts as a substitute caregiver throughout the text for her nieces and nephews, suggesting a queer role in reproductive futurity. I argue that Raylene is a queer-lesbian character because of her sexual object choice of other women, her geographic and ideological separation from her extended family, and because she expresses a different, queer orientation to the future than other characters. (I use queer here to refer to non-

binary, Other, and non-linear.) As Raylene's sexual orientation is hinted at for the most of the text and revealed in the final pages, I explore issues of the closet and lesbian identity in this chapter. Eve Sedgwick writes that the closet is "the deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption...people find new walls springing up around them...every encounter with a new class full of students, to say nothing of a new boss, social worker, loan officer, landlord, doctor, erects new closets" (68). For Sedgwick, normative assumptions of heterosexuality function to make entering and exiting the closet an ongoing process. Yet, José Esteban Muñoz points out that the binary, linear narrative of queer people coming out of closet itself can be an act of heteronormative avoidance. For example, he argues that biographers who claim poet Elizabeth Bishop was closeted actually use the closet to avoid "having to talk about the role of queer identity and queer sexuality throughout her work" (Cruising 72). For this reason, I am careful of Sedgwick's closet, and I engage with José Quiroga's work on queer masking and "open secrets" in Latino culture to explore ways Aunt Raylene resists finite lesbian identity narratives (2). Finally, I use Judith Butler's work on the performativity of gender to investigate carework as a feminized performance. As Raylene embodies both masculinity and femininity, but consistently does feminized carework for the women, men, and children in her extended family, she offers an example of lesbian disidentification with femininity (Muñoz, Disidentification 3).

Previous Criticism on *Bastard Out of Carolina*.

In this section I explore the types of critical extraction that occur in the discourse about *Bastard*. In particular, I am interested in ways critics respond to Aunt Raylene's lesbianism, as why so many secondary helping woman characters are lesbian is central to

my research. Since these characters often appear in texts with abusive men, I explore critical responses to Glen. Finally, as part of Aunt Raylene's healing role in this text is through confessions she makes about her own life to Bone, I explore critical responses which argue for reading *Bastard* as not just a novel, but as *testimonio* too.²⁴

In regards to criticism about Aunt Raylene, sometimes critics hint at her lesbianism without overtly identifying it. In particular, they export particular qualities associated with lesbianism—female resistance communities, independence, substitute mothering—but ignore the sexual object choice which defines lesbianism.²⁵ I argue this makes her sexuality simultaneously visible and invisible, as it forms an odd feedback loop in which the qualities used to mark lesbianism—such as independence from men—are used in place of lesbian identification. This "open closeting" needs to be approached with attention to region and identity politics, as Katherine Henninger notes that:

Southern literary characters such as Aunt Raylene in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Aunts Faith and Merleen in Shay Youngblood's *Soul Kiss*, and Mab Segrest's 83-year-old neighbor Lisabeth in "My Mother's Dead Squirrel" suggest that as long as it remains un-named, lesbian life can proceed relatively un-harassed in the South. Southern lesbian writers in particular have created these memorable "Aunt" characters, perhaps to stake a claim of ancestry and organicism for southern lesbianism (106).

In other words, Henninger argues that the un-naming of southern lesbian aunts is protective. I would add to that José Quiroga's notion that "exotic locales may be a way of covering up sexual content, as a decoy that allows critics to notice the atmosphere of the novel and not its erotics" (21). In a sense, the South itself becomes a type of quaint closet

²⁴ Doris Sommer notes that Latina *testimonio* is characterized by narrators who disavow themselves as singular subjects and claim a collective voice (107).

²⁵ See Courtney George's, "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels"; J. Brooks Bourson's " "You Nothin but Trash": White Trash Shame in Dorothy Allison's 'Bastard Out of Carolina.'"; Vincent King's "Hopeful Grief: The Prospect of a Postmodernist Feminism in Allison's 'Bastard out of Carolina'."

for those who cannot read the signs and connect un-named lesbianism to a southern tradition.²⁶ For at least the past two hundred years, American writers, historians, and cultural critics have designated the South as "other." In fact the discourse on southern "otherness" has connected the South to emotions, naiveté, and darkness, thus setting up the South as potentially one of Quiroga's "exotic locales."²⁷ Following Henninger's reasoning that un-naming can allow for lesbian presence, as well as Quiroga's point that locales can act as closets, it is unsurprising that many of the critics who focus on Raylene's independent femininity but elide her lesbianism are found in *The Southern Literary Journal*.

For example, in "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky-Tonk Angels," Courtney George refers to Bone's "eccentric aunt Raylene" (134). Similarly, J. Brooks Bourson quotes the text that Aunt Raylene was "kind of wild" when she was younger, but this is paired with Aunt Raylene's own closeting of herself as Bourson quotes the novel: "I like to watch things pass...Time and men and trash out on the river" (118). Also published in *The Southern Literary Journal*, Vincent King dances close to Raylene's queer identity by noting that Raylene went by the name Ray when she was young and worked at the carnival, yet he leaves out her queered appearance of short hair and overalls (134). All three note both the

²⁶ I am not suggesting that the South is the only region in the United States that can function as a closet. Seven years after *Bastard* was published, Ann Patchett wrote a best selling book, *The Magician's Assistant* with a protagonist who is rescued by a lesbian relationship. Not one review of the text mentions the lesbian couple, nor does Patchett ever identify them as such. They are described as "Kitty and Sabine were both women, and despite their mutual lack of luck with men, they were not women inclined naturally towards other women" (313). Yet, Sabine the narrator describes their relationship as "the thing that everyone had told her about, the thing that she had given up for Parsifal before she really understood what it was" (350).

²⁷ For example, Thomas Jefferson wrote that Northerners were "cool, sober, laborious, independent, jealous of their own liberties, and just to those of others...In the South they are fiery, voluptuary, indolent, unsteady, jealous for their own liberties, but trampling those of others" (qtd. in Spaulding 10).

importance of Raylene's nurturing and independence: King calls her "fiercely independent...also caring and nurturing" (134); George says she provides a female "resistance community" for Bone (134); Brooks claims that Raylene "acts as a mother substitute" (117) and offers "respite and safety" (118). One can read critics neglecting Dorothy Allison's connection of nurturing, independence, and mother substitution with lesbianism as a form of open closeting, however I argue that this critical move, in a sense, mirrors Allison's approach to Raylene. Aunt Raylene does not "out" herself until the very end of the text, suggesting that Allison, as Quiroga does in *Tropic of Desire*, "challenges the sense of unproblematized visibility manifested in taking on homosexuality as an identity narrative" (3). For Quiroga, blind adoption of the middle class, Anglo United States' "out" narrative and homosexual identity elides issues of racial, economic, and state oppression (8). In the context of examining Raylene as a Magical Lesbian, I use Quiroga to remember that the construct of lesbian identity itself can come with its own oppressions. Indeed, Blanche McCrary Boyd notes that "*Bastard* wasn't listed for the Lambda Award for Lesbian Fiction because it wasn't lesbian enough" (20).²⁸ Thus an established LGBTQ literary organization ignored this text—perhaps because it queered the construct of lesbian identity by Allison's use of lesbian qualities for most of the text instead of lesbian identification.

I notice in my reading of *Bastard* that the magical acts of secondary lesbian characters not only pay their "price of admission" but also substitute for lesbianism and mark secondary lesbian characters as lesbian. In other words, the magical is a narrative sublimation of lesbian object choice and eroticism that simultaneously queers secondary

²⁸ The Lambda awards are a series of literary awards for LGBTQ writers. 2014 marked the 26th year of the awards.

lesbian characters. As I will show in a later section, Aunt Raylene's sexuality moves in and out of focus as the qualities associated with lesbianism both conceal and reveal her sexuality. However, the magic of a Magical Lesbian is also about transformation, as Aunt Raylene and the other secondary characters in this study shift both narrator perceptions and physical realities (e.g. as I showed in chapter 2, Shug physically removes Celie from her abusive husband and provides Celie with a new spirituality). Critical readings of Aunt Raylene note her power to change other characters, such as Vincent King who labels Aunt Raylene as magical as he writes that Bone is searching for " 'something magical' to transform her and her world" and that Aunt Raylene "finally offers her that elusive magic" (134). What does it matter then, if these "magical" secondary characters happen to be lesbians? And if certain critics leave that out?²⁹ I agree with Quiroga about the restrictiveness of a solely identitarian affiliation with queerness and I do not think openly acknowledging Raylene's lesbianism necessarily leads to a "better" reading of the text. But I do think that referring to Raylene as lesbian shifts the critical conversation about *Bastard* both by challenging sexual binaries in the construction of identity and by allowing us to explore ways patriarchy imposes a particular heteronormativity that can be abusive, incestuous, and dehumanizing to women.

Eve Sedgwick notes that both being classified as gay or potentially gay causes a fracture between "a universalizing discourse of acts or bonds and at the same time of a minoritizing discourse of kinds of persons. Because of the double binds implicit in the space overlapped by universalizing and minoritizing models, the stakes in the matter of

²⁹ There is also a pattern in contemporary North American culture of book reviewers eliding lesbianism in mainstream texts. For example, there are 24 book reviews of Ann Patchett's *The Magician's Assistant* (1997), but not one of them mentions the lesbian relationship in the text.

definitional control are extremely high" (54). In other words, while the binary of gay/not gay is infinitely problematic, as it narrows a spectrum of possible sexualities and attractions into one point while also marking this possibility as perpetually outside the norm. Thus, whether we want it to be or not, which side of the binary a character falls on is not only socially and culturally important, but crucial in the reading of the text. And interestingly enough, *Bastard* criticism that openly acknowledges Aunt Raylene's lesbianism takes on binary constructions of sexual identity by simultaneously investigating heterosexuality and lesbianism.

For example, Deborah Horvitz in "Sadism Demands a Story": Oedipus, Feminism, and Sexuality in Gayl Jones's "Corregidora" and Dorothy Allison's "Bastard Out of Carolina" argues that "Allison provides lesbianism as an alternative to the dangers of heterosexuality" (253). Horvitz claims that Allison presents heterosexual relationships in the text as dull or dangerous, offering Aunt Raylene as the only Boatwright woman who is happy. As I will argue in this chapter, I disagree with Horvitz because I think Aunt Raylene's contentedness is a projection of other characters.³⁰ Yet Horvitz demonstrates the utility in a lesbian centric critique: she uses *Bastard* to investigate heterosexuality as a psychoanalytic construct. Katrina Irving centers on lesbianism in "*Writing it down so that it would be real*": Narrative Strategies in Dorothy Allison's "Bastard Out of Carolina" to argue that Raylene both challenges the hetero/homosexual binary, while Bone's sexual

³⁰ In particular, Horvitz is concerned with the dangers of battering and child abuse, which she links to heterosexual relationship in the text, writing "this text yokes male-female intimacy with the potential denial/destruction of women" (244). However, Horvitz, like many contemporary North American authors, labels lesbianism as "safe." She writes that Dorothy Allison connects "Raylene's lesbianism and artistic creativity with comfort and safety" (253).

development demonstrates that lesbianism is not an "innate tendency" but "produced by a patriarchal system that needs marginal subjects in order to demarcate and structure its own boundaries" (103, 97). Both these critics argue that Raylene points to problems with social structures such as the nuclear and heterosexual family, compulsory heterosexuality, and the hetero/homosexual binary. They ask us not just to look at heterosexuality differently, but to question assumptions about lesbian identity. For example, Irving suggests that the line between lesbian/not lesbian is blurred by the final scene of the text when Bone thinks, "I was who I was going to be, someone like her [Raylene], like Mama, a Boatwright woman" (Allison 309). For Irving, "by collapsing Raylene/Mama...the text illustrates the instability of the hetero/homosexual binary" (103).

These critics I've mentioned who use lesbianism as a point of encounter to critique the text and its social milieu, however, are not in the majority, as regionalism, class, trauma studies, and genre theory dominate criticism on Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Yet, while these critics neglect to discuss binary constructions of sexual identities, they often challenge binary conceptions of class and genre. Many critics praise Allison for her portrayal of working class southern white culture.³¹ As the plot of *Bastard* revolves around Bone's trauma, theories about trauma flow throughout the critical discourse. But when addressing the circumstances which created Bone's trauma, critics tend to focus on who or

³¹ See Moira Baker "The politics of 'they' ": Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina* as critique of class, gender, and sexual ideologies"; Kate Davy's "Outing whiteness: A feminist/lesbian project"; John Hartigan's "Unpopular culture: The case of 'white trash' "; Katie Henninger "Claiming Access: Controlling Images in Dorothy Allison"; David Reynolds "White Trash in Your Face: The Literary Descent of Dorothy Allison"; Katherine McDonald's "Talking Trash, Talking Back: Resistance to Stereotypes in Dorothy Allison's" *Bastard out of Carolina*.

what is to blame, or what Allison's representation of trauma reveals about broader social structures of class, race, sexuality, and the form of the novel itself.

Most often, critics elide Daddy Glen's responsibility for Bone's trauma. I mention this not to condemn critics, but to note the wide-reaching range of discourse about trauma and its causes. In the case of *Bastard*, critics center on social circumstances or Bone's mother while ignoring Glen. I find the tendency to focus on mothers' responsibilities (rather than fathers') for protecting children from trauma reflected when I teach *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Class discussion often turns to Bone's mother, Anney. My students want to condemn Anney for not protecting Bone from Glen Waddle. I shift the conversation to Glen, and to the questions Dorothy Allison says informed her work: "Why would anyone beat a child? Why would anyone rape a child?" (*Bastard* 319). I ask my students why Bone's stepfather beats and rapes her. It is a question they do not have an answer for; they would rather discuss Anney's mothering. The novel itself invites both these inquiries—why does Anney choose her husband over her daughter? why is Glen abusive? —yet the comfortable discussion circles back to Anney's mothering. Criticism on *Bastard* follows this trend, as there is little theorizing about Glen Waddle's psychological motivation or the social structures that make it possible for him to abuse Bone. The text suggests some psychological explanations for his behavior such as when Bone notes that "people talked about Glen's temper and his hands" and Bone's grandmother says Glen "got something wrong with him...He's always looking at me out the sides of his eyes like some old junkyard dog wanting to steal a bone. And you know Anney's the bone he wants" (35, 27). Bone points out that "people" and thus the community are aware of Glen's temper and his unusually large hands, suggesting that Glen has both a psychological make-up which tends

towards anger and the physical strength to act out that anger (35). Bone's grandmother comments on Glen's psychological issues and foreshadows Glen's destructive potential towards Bone with her image of the junkyard dog wanting a bone. Both these quotes suggest that Glen's psychology causes his abusive behavior and that the community and Bone's family already sees Glen as different from other men. But no one in the community attempts to police Glen's behavior; instead, Anney's mother and aunts warn her not to marry him (46). While I certainly do not think critics are engaging in victim-blaming when we investigate characters other than Glen, I believe this tendency warrants investigation.³² It is notable that within the character system of *Bastard*, Aunt Raylene encourages both Bone and Anney to stop blaming themselves. Outside of *Bastard*, many other contemporary North American novels by women pair secondary lesbian characters and abusive men.³³ Is there something about lesbian identified characters that makes them more able to challenge abusive heterosexual men and the patriarchal structures of victim-blaming? In the third section of this chapter, I will come back to these questions as I examine Aunt Raylene's attempts to stop both Anney and Bone from blaming themselves, and I will return to them again in Chapter 4, as I look at the Magical Lesbian in Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*.

When looking at the circumstances of Bone's abuse, critics either condemn Anney or fault social structures for not allowing Anney to protect Bone. For example, Natalie Carter

³² In Chapter 2, I noted that while Alice Walker was critiqued for her portrayal of black men as abusive, as an author she addresses the question of what leads Albert to beat his wife, while critics of TCP do not address this.

³³ This holds true for all three texts in this study as well as many others, such as: Sapphire's *Push*; Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents*; Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place*; Jodi Picoult's *Sing You Home*; Wally Lamb's *We Are Water*.

argues that because "patriarchal violence is so intrinsic to Southern culture...Daddy Glen's abuse of Bone may be horrifying and repulsive, it is not entirely unexpected...it is ultimately Anney's abandonment, and not Glen's prolonged physical sexual abuse, that is the source of this narrator's most grievous trauma" (887). Thus for Carter, child abuse is "southern," and thus less traumatic because it part of the southern gothic landscape. Carter's analysis scapegoats southern femininity, motherhood, and masculinity as it alludes to stereotypical portrayals of poor Southerners as violent and incestuous. Interestingly, Tarah Sweeting-Trotter avoids regional scapegoating and instead argues that Anney has been set up as powerless by the capitalist patriarchal class system. She claims that "Anney's parental agency is negated as a direct result of the patriarchal capitalist framework in which she is ensnared...Anney is faced with the crippling duality grounded in patriarchal capitalist system" (Sweeting-Trotter 74). For Sweeting-Trotter, patriarchal capitalism both demands that Anney marry to provide for her children and as a mother she is solely responsible for her children's protection; it is not the South that leads to this setup but rather capitalism which "robs Anney of agency" (74). However, before Glen, Anney supports both her daughters and herself waitressing; other secondary characters think Anney is marrying Glen because she is lonely (35; 41). I include these two critiques to point out that not only is it difficult to theorize Glen's behavior, but also to highlight how the conceptual relationship of region to trauma is a complex one. It would appear that the critical options for dealing with the novel's trauma perpetrator —fault the South, fault the broader socio-economic system, or ignore Glen altogether —point to how trauma narratives both evoke sexual, gender, and genre binaries while disrupting them. Carter's argument that Anney causes the *most* trauma for Bone suggests an either/or model for trauma (either

psychological or physical); Sweeting-Trotter's central question focuses on who is to blame—Anney or capitalist patriarchy—and leaves out Glen's responsibility.

While Dorothy Allison's own questions remain difficult for critics to answer, her representation of trauma has contributed to critical theorizing about the relationship between trauma and the novel. In fact, *Bastard* destabilizes genre boundaries as critics call into question the difference between a novel, autobiography, and memoir.³⁴ Leigh Gilmore argues in *The Limits of Autobiography* that with *Bastard* and her other work, "Dorothy Allison has been confounding generic categories and stretching the limits of self-representation discourse...called a novel, *Bastard Out of Carolina* immediately confronts a limit: Where does autobiography end and fiction begin in an autobiographical novel?" (45). Gilmore claims that the problems of representing trauma cause this genre fracture in *Bastard* (47). In response to Gilmore, Mélanie Grué argues that the overlap between fiction and non-fiction in *Bastard* shows that "the traumatic experience is difficult to translate into narrative, fiction becomes a tool that paradoxically allows the survivor to write more thoroughly about real-life experiences" (93).

Similar to my argument in Chapter 1 that the necessity of the category of lesbian fiction reveals both the hidden adjectives in front of the term "fiction" and the connection of texts to social identity, the debate over *Bastard's* genre points back to the arbitrary boundaries of the novelistic form. In other words, the discourse about *Bastard's* genre

³⁴ For example Latino/a diasporic late 20th early 21st century texts such as: Sandra Cisneros's *Caramelo* (2002); Junot Díaz's *Drown* (1996); Achy Obejas' *Memory Mambo* (1996); Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets* (1967); Esmeralda Santiago's *When I was Puerto Rican* (1994).

queers and situates the novel form.³⁵ For one, it reveals the connection between the novel genre and racial, gender, class, and sexual privilege. We saw this in the debates over Walker's use of form, in bell hooks referring to it as a parody of the slave narrative, in the critiques over Walker's language, all of which I read as pointing to the novel as reserved for a very particular set of narratives. In Chapter 4, we will see the genre debate again with critical reviews of Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*, in which critics claim it is an "unfinished novel" (Cohen 1). In other words, white, heterosexual men write novels: the Other distorts the form.³⁶ The novel as a genre is moored to racial, gender, and sexual identity. Laura Barbas-Rhoden notes that "when the marginalized women, indigenous people, and Africans began to *write* their own stories...they appropriated the novel to disrupt the flow of the dominant narrative from within" (3). In other words, the very form of the novel is connected to a particular type of dominant narrative; unsurprisingly, the three texts I examine in this project (Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*; Dorothy Allison's *Bastard Out of Carolina*; and Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*) weave autobiography, fiction, and region together, appropriating and disrupting the novel.

In the case of *Bastard*, as Lynda Hart notes, content plays a crucial role in delineating the novel genre. She writes that for *Bastard* "what is really at stake in this concern over the novel's genre is the content, for it is presumed that one who writes about incest *must* have

³⁵ By queering I mean destabilizing and transforming the novel genre in the specific ways I mention here.

³⁶ I am not arguing that distortion is necessarily negative—playing with and distorting form often leads to artistic innovation. However, as the *Vida* Count since 2009 has indicated, fiction by women is vastly underrepresented in North American mainstream literary journals and book reviews. Since *Vida* began a yearly count in 2009 of women writers in journals such as *Granta*, *Tin House*, the *New York Times Book Review*, and the *Paris Review*, has noted that few journals achieve gender parity.

experienced it...in other words, since incest is the dominant culture's *secret*, then anyone who knows enough [to write about it], must have been the 'victim'" (174). Drawing upon Doris Sommer's work on Latin American Women's writing, Hart decides that *Bastard's* form rests between autobiography and *testimonio* (174). Doris Sommer explains that *testimonio* differs from autobiography in that the "I" in *testimonio* represents a "collective self" which has "the possibility to get beyond the gap between public and private spheres and beyond the helpless solitude that has plagued Western women...since the rise of capitalism" (110). Dorothy Allison's own writing about audience response to *Bastard* confirms Hart's connection between the text and *testimonio*. In the Afterword to the 20th edition of *Bastard*, Allison begins with, " 'You told my story,' the man in the Peterbilt cap said to me," which suggests that the singular narrator, Bone, works as a collective as her story becomes "my story" for people of other genders, places, and times (311). Allison argues that the legislation banning her novel is an attempt to silence the cultural reality of child abuse (314). She also explains that she creates a fictional account based on her own experiences so that she would be "telling a story that made sense of what did not make sense, and telling it plainly enough that anyone who wanted to could point to it and say 'that's my story'" (314). Thus labeling *Bastard* a *testimonio* aligns with Sommer's argument that collective subject of *testimonio* "is a reminder that life continues at the margins of Western discourse, and continues to disturb and challenge it" (111). While *Bastard* is arguably more canonical than marginal, it has been banned from school systems in Maine and Fremont, CA, which suggests that the text does indeed challenge and disturb certain discourses (Allison 316).³⁷ Allison herself makes an argument for the relationship of her

³⁷ The Fremont, CA school board banned *Bastard* from being taught in a honors English

fiction to *testimonio* as she says it is one of the "books that scare parents and challenge teachers and librarians to have to answer the question of young people encountering the issues of violence or sex or prejudice in such visceral, intimate terms" (320). I agree: *Bastard* challenges the form of the novel genre, and viewing it as testimonial/novel is useful for exploring how form and content can work together to undermine established novel genre boundaries.

Aunt Raylene, Queer Futurity and Chrono-Normativity

In this section, I look at temporality both from the queer theory tradition and I borrow from anthropology to look at how temporality constructs Aunt Raylene as "other." In Johannes Fabian's landmark *Time and the Other*, he explains that anthropology uses "various devices of temporal distancing" to create "the Other" (50). In particular, he compares African concepts of time to the Western model, and notes that anthropology viewed any cultural experience of time outside of a linear model as inferior. Thus temporality is another axis through which Western epistemology creates difference. As I will demonstrate, while *Bastard* follows a linear story of Bone coming of age, Aunt Raylene queers the linear timeline in *Bastard*. While Aunt Raylene challenges heteronormative ideas of time, which Muñoz refers to as *straight time* and Elizabeth Freeman calls *chrono-normativity*, Raylene also uses chrono-normativity and temporality to defend herself

class because "the scenes of violence were too graphic and the subject matter inappropriate for high school students," yet Ha Jin's *Waiting* (2000) which is also based on a true story and contains adult rape was approved (Tat, np). Similarly, in 1995, *Bastard* was banned from Mt. Abram High School in Maine for "language and inappropriate subject matter" (Pinault, np). This evokes Lynda Hart's theory that child abuse is a collective secret of North American culture as these school districts deemed representations of child abuse and incest as inappropriate.

against criticism from other characters of her non-normative life (22, 3).³⁸ Muñoz explains that "Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life. The only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality" (Utopia 22). We accept this straight time through what Freeman dubs chrono-normativity: "a mode of implantation, a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts" (3). In other words, the mechanisms through which we understand and mark time—birthdays, wedding anniversaries, clocks—construct an experience of time which seems natural and is tied into heterosexual constructs. While Muñoz offers queer futurity and queer utopias as a means to combat this model, I argue in this section and Chapter 4 that feminized lesbian caretaking constitutes a queer futurity that is also enmeshed with heteronormative reproductive futurity.

Throughout *Bastard*, while Aunt Raylene offers Bone temporal counter-narratives and a non-reproductive futurity, Raylene is in temporal tension with other characters. Raylene both challenges chrono-normativity when it is imposed upon her by other characters and invokes, sometimes simultaneously, futurity and history. For example, when Bone spends three days learning to can food with Raylene and Anney, Anney evokes chrono-normativity to criticize both Raylene and Bone, but Raylene playfully (and queerly) throws it back to Anney. In this scene, Anney has just told Bone she was not watching the canning jars carefully enough and Raylene has defended Bone. Anney responds with:

"Raylene, you're spoiling her. You should have had some of your own, and then you'd watch them all a little more sharply."

"Well, for not birthing any, it sure feels like I've raised a crowd. Seems like I've had somebody's kids under my feet for years now. An't nobody in this family

³⁸ Arjun Appadurai's work on ways transnational nostalgia without memory "plays havoc with the hegemony of Eurochronolgy" is interesting to think about in context of ways Aunt Raylene works with temporality and memory (30).

ever been selfish with their children. Why, I've got up many a morning to find a porch full of young-uns somebody's dropped off in the night" (189).

Anney uses the subjunctive to impose chrono-normativity and reproductive futurity on Raylene. Both Anney's subjunctive "have had" and the idea of spoiling Bone project a chrono-normative, reproductive futurity on Raylene. The subjunctive, paired with the reference to biological children, suggests that biology is the only way to become a competent mother, and that Raylene has missed this opportunity. This is straight time: Raylene did not have her "own" children and there is no way to remedy that. The subjunctive lets us know that was a possibility, but is one no longer. Raylene's response both brings to the surface what Anney means by "own" and challenges heteronormative reproductive futurity. When Raylene points out she did not birth children but she raised plenty of them, she claims a role in reproductive futurity, and also destabilizes the chrono-normative heterosexual model. If Raylene is caring for all of her sister's children, it suggests that the gendered carework expectations placed on heterosexual women who "birth" children are too much. Furthermore, Raylene uses the word "raised," not watched or babysat. Thus she stakes a claim in her role in reproductive futurity: she argues that childcare labor, not just biological motherhood, gives her the authority to parent Bone.

In this particular canning scene, the two times Anney criticizes Bone, Raylene first defends Bone, then shifts the conversation to the past. As Anney and Raylene reminisce about when the sheriff came to repossess their sister Alma's furniture, but Alma would not let him take it, Raylene who keeps using the word time, "Remember that time Alma wouldn't let the sheriff take her furniture?...That time she started screaming..." while Anney uses the past tense to respond, "That sheriff like to peed in his pants when he saw her"

(188). For Carolyn Dinshaw, queer temporality is connecting "affectively with the past...touching across time, collapsing time through affective contact" (178). That is what happens in this scene: Anney's focus is on the present and what Bone is doing wrong with the canning. When Raylene defends Bone, Anney uses chrono-normativity to point out that Raylene has deviated from straight time. As Raylene troubles Anney's ideas about biological motherhood, she also steers the conversation to connect with the past. Anney laughs as she and Raylene reminisce about these stories, while Raylene's use of the word time in this scene suggests she is a temporal guide (Allison 188-9). In fact, she stakes her place in reproductive futurity and uses affect to hitch and unhitch other characters to the past. In other words, Raylene represents Fabian's *coevalness*, "a mode of temporal relations...It is not 'there' and cannot be put there; it must be created or at least approached" (34). Thus Raylene challenges the same linear temporal assumptions Fabian rejects when he urges anthropologists to stop imposing Western (linear) temporality onto other cultures (Fabian 35). Raylene does not separate out the past, present, and future, but instead keeps drawing other characters' attention to the fluidity of time and the ability to move back and forth through memory and telling.

While Raylene uses humor as a temporal bridge in the canning scene, when she connects the entire Boatwright family to their racial and ethnic heritage, she evokes anger. Bone says, "I hated Aunt Raylene's jokes that we were all peasant stock descendants of women who used to deliver babies in the fields and stagger up to work just after" (206). Here Bone is frustrated because she wants her body to be pretty and feminine, but Aunt Raylene's jokes about the past predict Bone's corporeal future. Bone's body type may be a

future she cannot escape, but Raylene offers Bone alternatives to the heteronormative options surrounding her. She tells Bone:

I'm so tired of people whining about what might happen to them, never taking no chances or doing anything new. I'm glad you an't gonna be like that, Bone. I'm counting on you to get out there and do things, girl. Make people nervous and make your old aunt glad (182).

Here, Raylene is again frustrated with the subjunctive—people worrying about what might be in the future. She points out how this fear keeps people stuck, and when she tells Bone her hopes, she uses the present tense, rather than conditional. Raylene does not say that Bone *could* go out and do things; instead, she uses present verb tenses to connect to a future that she sees as more solid than the conditional. Raylene's refusal to use subjunctive and conditional verb tenses here marks her as queer character, as Muñoz claims that "queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (1). In Aunt Raylene's sentiment that she is counting on Bone to do things that "make people nervous," there is the suggestion of a concrete critique of her world (people do not take risks) and an imagined future for Bone. The fact that Raylene's insistence that Bone live a different life must be read in context of Raylene's own risk taking: she once ran off to the circus and passed as a man (179). Thus Raylene possesses what Muñoz refers to as "utopian longing" which he describes as "a force field of affect and political desire" (Cruising 35). In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz looks at what he refers to as "queer utopian memory" as a memory which has the power to shift queer futurity (35). Raylene's own memory (and ultimately queer failure, as in the conclusion of *Bastard*, she expresses her regret for her lost love) informs her utopian predictions for Bone's future (300).

Muñoz's theory of queer utopia is broad-reaching and groundbreaking: he reclaims utopia as multifaceted in that it includes queer failure and disappointment ("Cruising" 173, 188). Using Muñoz, I recast Aunt Raylene not simply as a closeted lesbian but as a powerful queer character who intervenes on existing notions of queer futurity. Yet, as a character, Raylene shows us that feminized lesbian caretaking has a unique role in queer futurity, thus problematizing other theories of queer futurity. Most markedly, Raylene's character offers a critique of Lee Edelman's model of queer temporality. Unlike Lee Edelman's argument in *No Future* which argues that "[t]he sacralization of the Child thus necessitates the sacrifice of the queer," my theory of the Magical Lesbian shows that secondary lesbian characters are domesticated and made to do healing work within the context of the heterosexual family (28). However, Magical Lesbians still challenge heterosexual family structures by pointing to a problem of the heteronormative family construct—there is too much labor for mothers who must look after both husbands and children—while they fill in this gap by assuming responsibility for this carework.³⁹ This domestication is achieved through feminine labor, which I will be exploring in the next section. Yet this domestication also points to ways secondary lesbian characters resist chrono-normativity. Elizabeth Freeman points out that household labor challenges linear models of time as "linear temporality...is complicated by the repetition-compulsion that is housework" (41). Carework is cyclical rather than linear. Clean laundry becomes dirty and must be cleaned

³⁹ This "gap" is what Arlie Hochschild refers to as the care deficit (210). While her work centers on how women from the developing world fills the care deficit for first world women (creating what she calls a "chain of care" which takes care away from children in the developing world). Yet the novels in this study suggest a model of the chain of care where Hochschild's "broken links" could be filled by unpaid queer women. While these texts represent possibilities, it would be interesting to see research on ways queer women's caring contributes to heteronormative family structures.

again. Raylene and Anney preserve food at the end of every summer. Unlike the factory line where Aunt Raylene worked, the products of caring—such as cleaned homes and cooked meals—are used up and endlessly reproduced. Yet caring for children and the dying are examples of caring which appears finite: children grow up, the elderly and diseased die. It is interesting that much theorizing on queer caring centers on dying (such as Ann Cvetkovich's research on narratives of lesbian caring for men dying of AIDS, and Tom Heymann's film *Paper Dolls*, which documents Filipino drag queens who care for elderly Israeli men).⁴⁰ While this may seem to suggest a movement in queer research on caring towards linear temporality (i.e. the elderly and diseased die, and care ends), it is, in fact, connected to alternate temporalities. Muñoz as well looks at the bridges between memorialization and the present, writing that "the manner in which ghosts exist inside and out and traverse categorical distinctions seems especially useful for a queer criticism that attempts to understand communal mourning...and the need for a politics that 'carries' our dead with us into battles for the present and future" (Cruising 46). Thus research on queer caring and death makes use of the anti-binary properties of the Muñoz's ghosts: they move through categories and are temporally fluid. Returning to Fabian's coevalness, Muñoz's work on the importance of ghosts, haunting, and specters as well as queer caring for the dying offers an alternative to what Fabian refers to as "Western disbelief in the presence of ancestors" (34). Of course, Muñoz does not argue for the ghosts and haunting as particular personalities; rather, he focuses on temporal, spatial, and ideological ghosts as they relate

⁴⁰ There is also a significant amount of literature from the social sciences on caring in gay and lesbian chosen families, as well as studies comparing labor division in two parent lesbian households with heterosexual households.

to queer utopia. So, if queer carework around death reveals carework itself as resistant to Western linear temporality, what does queer-lesbian caring for children suggest?

There is, as I have established, a cyclical temporality to caring which moves it outside of straight time and into a queer perspective. Yet when it comes to childcare, queer theorists, particularly Edelman, argue that childcare is heteronormative. For example, Edelman argues that "Queerness names the side of 'not fighting for the children' the side of outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the value of reproductive futurism" (3). But where does lesbian caretaking fit into Edelman's argument? The pattern of Magical Lesbians in North American literature, particularly the trope of lesbian characters (both major and minor) rescuing children from physical and sexual abuse by men, and specifically the character of Aunt Raylene, suggests that reproductive futurism is already intertwined with lesbian labor. In other words, Edelman does not account for the queerness of feminized carework in his model, nor does he address the working class futurity found in Aunt Raylene's feminine tasks and her hopes for Bone's future.

Critics have noted Edelman's reliance on a universal subject (which does not exist) for his theory. Jafari S. Allen points out that Edelman's and post-modern queer theory leaves "little room for anything -- 'no future,' indeed—beyond a yawning pessimism, which queers of color have, time after time insisted our communities cannot afford" (222). While Muñoz argues that "Theories of queer temporality that fail to factor in the relational relevance of race or class merely reproduce a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly atemporal—which is to say a subject whose time is a restricted and restricting hollowed-out present free of the need for the challenge of imagining a futurity that exists beyond the self or the here and now" (94). But neither Muñoz nor Allen specifically

critique Edelman for ignoring that queer labor —often lesbian labor—is already tied into representations of reproductive futurity. Aunt Raylene shows us that lesbian caring is a crucial part of reproductive futurity, as she is the character who ultimately provides Bone with a future and a home.

Aunt Raylene, Feminine Performance, and the Invisibility/Visibility Dialogic-Dialectic

Annamarie Jagose observes that criticism of lesbian representation misconstrues lesbian visibility and invisibility as separate (179). She argues that we should conceive of "lesbian 'visibility' not as a solution but as a variant of lesbian 'invisibility': both can be seen as the historical effects of a contradictory but tightly worked network of counterweighted relations among masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality, and homosexuality that is internal to the modern gender system" (179). In other words, lesbian visibility and invisibility are not diametrically opposed to one another, but instead can be read as dependent upon one another, as our very perception of visibility vs. invisibility has already been determined by the binary sex gender system. Jagose refers to this as the visibility-invisibility dialectic (180). While Jagose focuses on historical lesbian representations and temporality, Quiroga uses a 1993 Gay Pride March in Buenos Aires which had masked participants to argue for a broader view of queer identity as "part of the equation, but...not the *only* part of the equation. The mask spoke of broader circuits that did not necessarily end with an 'outing,' or an identity as conclusion" (1). Both Jagose and Quiroga are calling for a disidentification with lesbian/homosexual identity. Muñoz argues that "disidentificatory performances...resist the social matrix of dominant publicity by exposing the rhetorical/ideological context of state power...Disidentification permits the

subject of ideology to contest the interpellations of the dominant ideology" (Disidentification 168). To look at lesbian visibility-invisibility as a dialogic-dialectic resists Western rhetorical tendencies towards binary analysis, as well as accounts for the slippery locations of queer identity that both Muñoz and Quiroga suggest. In other words, Jagose's temporality looks at lesbian representation as derivative of heterosexualities, (and ultimately presented as second-best, such as with 1950s pulp fiction), while my dialogic-dialectic model suggests that queer lesbian temporality can be harnessed for reproductive heterosexual futurity in contemporary narratives (179). Thus, in this section, I expand Jagose's idea of the lesbian visibility-invisibility dialectic to include the dialogic as a means to explore ways Aunt Raylene disidentifies with feminine gender performance. Furthermore, I explore in this section and in Chapter 4 how lesbians as substitute parents demonstrate the permeability of the visibility-invisibility dialectic, pushing towards a dialogic model of the visibility-invisibility dyad. Finally, while Jagose concentrates on how temporal sequences create the visibility-invisibility dialectic of lesbian representation, I use temporality to explore ways lesbian caring is harnessed by the heteronormative project of feminized carework. While I am deeply indebted to Jagose's work on lesbian representation, her visibility-invisibility dialectic neglects the role of feminized caring, such as Aunt Raylene's childcare, in lesbian representation. As lesbian caring becomes yoked to feminized caretaking in *Bastard*, I argue that accounting for feminized caretaking shifts Jagose's temporal sequences to a dialogic-dialectic. In other words, taking into consideration ways authors represent feminine behavioral norms—such as carework—through lesbian characters requires a dialogic model.⁴¹ Unlike dialectics, which come to a

⁴¹ Interestingly, carework itself resists linear temporality and is difficult to measure. If one

resolution, carework is ongoing and varies greatly by epoch, race, sexuality, and social class. A carework dialogic takes into account not only the never-ending nature of carework but also the fluid relationship of lesbian characters to heteronormative structures. Finally, Dorothy Allison use of natural images in conjunction with representing Raylene's difference from other women in the text works to position and reposition Raylene within the lesbian invisibility-visibility dialogic-dialectic.

Landscape metaphors provide the first glimpse of Aunt Raylene and show us an example of substitutions and placeholders for Raylene's sexuality. In the temporal sequence of *Bastard*, our introduction to Aunt Raylene comes with natural imagery.

Weeping willows marched across the yard, following every wandering stream and ditch, their long whiplike fronds making tents that sheltered sweet smelling beds of clover. Over at the house Aunt Raylene rented near the river, all the trees had been cut back, the scuppernong vines torn out (17).

The image of tree branches protecting "sweet smelling beds of clover" suggests feminine sexuality, yet the willow fronds conceal the clover. In the following sentence, however, Raylene is set up as a character whose sexual desire must be kept at a distance. The trees are gone, and the muscadine grape vines are torn out. This natural imagery forecasts Raylene as a tamed, domesticated lesbian character within a sexually charged environment. There is a suggestion already that Raylene has chosen and cemented an open secret sexuality: there is no subject in the second clause of the sentence who cuts back the trees or rips out the vines. They simply are that way. Yet the first thing we see in the passage is the lush willows and clover, suggesting that Raylene's desire is present but it has been

puts in a load of laundry and cooks dinner in the interim, then folds laundry while talking on the phone, how do we measure that? Is one hour of caring for cooking while laundry runs? In the realm of the novel, carework is used to ground scenes in physical reality while characters think or speak.

removed from the domesticated space of the home. Julia Kristeva explains that it is "not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (4). Note that the willows "march" across the yard, a verb which both acts as a metonymy for the military and, because it is paired with the natural, suggests a very powerful disorder. In other words, Raylene's sexuality is projected onto the nature just outside her yard, which is abject because it does not respect borders. The vines right by Raylene's home have been "torn out" because otherwise they will take over. The contrast between Raylene's home and yard represent female sexuality as wild, dangerous, and abject. This domesticated space seems sanitized and shorn, creating a paradigm for the representation of female sexuality as dangerous and in need of taming. Raylene contains what grows close to her home; as Bone notes "Raylene kept the trees cut back and the shrubs low to the ground. 'I don't like surprises,' she always said. 'I like to see whose coming up on me' " (179). Raylene's home, like other Magical Lesbian homes, offers respite and safety to other characters, thus the cut-back trees and torn-out vines right by her home implicate a tamed female sexuality that is self-imposed as a way to detract attention while keeping lesbian sexuality outside the sexual economy of heteronormativity. While Raylene lives far away from town and is reclusive, her home and privacy represent a contained sexuality (179). Quiroga's Gay Pride March analysis notes that many of the participants wore masks and that the "open masking was a brilliant tactical move, in ways that had nothing to do with the standard epistemologies of the closet...It was part of a complex dynamic of subject and identity, and the closet was one element among many" (1). Thus for Quiroga, while open masking is strategic in that it protected marchers from being seen by those who had power over them (such as

employers), it also speaks to intersectionality and a refusal by the Buenos Aires LGBT movement to separate sexual oppression from economic and racial oppression (2). Furthermore, the open masking of the Buenos Aires parade shows that individual privacy can be maintained in order to achieve a collective visibility.⁴² Thus Raylene's privacy is not synonymous with the closet (as Sedgwick defines it), but instead, Raylene's reclusiveness marks both a rejection of heteronormative ideas of femininity as relational as it simultaneously keeps her sexuality on the margins of the town of Greenville, SC, and of the narrative.⁴³

Raylene "lived out past the city limits," and her isolation functions as part of the invisibility-visibility dialogic-dialectic that acts as part of the feedback loop where qualities associated with lesbianism stand in for lesbian identification (178). No other family member ever mentions why Raylene does not have a husband, and Bone's mother is protective of this open secret, even threatening Bone "you're not too big to have your britches warmed" when she asks about Raylene (177). Yet, Raylene's independence from men is praised and valued by the Boatwright family. Bone thinks Raylene is content living alone, saying, "Raylene had always been different from her sisters. She was quieter, more

⁴² A similar "open concealment" occurred during the 2014 Baton Rouge Pride March where a trans woman speaker asked reporters to not name her for fear of retribution by employers, or during the 2010 Unitarian Baton Rouge Pride service, where transgendered church members had other straight members read their speeches aloud to maintain anonymity. Both cases mark examples of open closets as the speakers/writers were sharing their experiences but not their identities, and their stories became part of a collective goal of visibility while maintaining individual privacy.

⁴³ A queer reading of this text as Raylene's private coming out story is also possible, as it would further expand the boundaries of contemporary standard notions of the closet. Raylene only "comes out" to one character—Bone—and for the purpose of helping Bone to heal trauma rather than as a means to live a better life for herself. Thus, in some ways, Raylene's coming out can also be read as a feminized sacrifice of self for the child.

private, living alone with her dogs and fishing lines, seemingly happy that way" (178).

However, Bone qualifies her perception with "seemingly," indicating that she is not ready to pass judgment on Raylene's happiness. Raylene's sisters, however, are willing to debate Raylene's state of mind:

Deedee had called her a lonely old woman once, but Ruth had shushed her, saying a woman was only lonely who wasn't happy with herself, and Raylene was probably the only person any of us would ever meet who was completely satisfied with her own company (179).

At the end of the novel, Raylene reveals that she is not so content to be living without a lover; I argue that her perceived happiness is a projection of other characters. Other characters' interpretations of Raylene's aloneness are analogous with literary and film representation systems that present magic Negroes as fulfilled through providing service to whites.⁴⁴ The Boatwright family gossip presents Raylene as content with herself. In fact, this quote also suggests that it is Raylene's trials—being alone—which have given her special powers. Self-satisfaction and living outside the city limits in a character system where women are marked by caring and trapped by economics and compulsory heterosexuality might indeed seem magical. Throughout the text, Raylene distinguishes herself through both her knowledge of family history and her efforts to provide Bone with a way to cope with being poor. For example, while Bone is watching a bus filled with rich children pass by, she tells Aunt Raylene she hates the children because they look at her and Raylene "like we're something nasty" (262). Raylene tells Bone:

⁴⁴ Matthew Hughey argues that the magic Negro "often appears as a lower class, uneducated black person who possess supernatural or magical powers. These powers are used to save and transform disheveled, uncultured, lost, or broken whites," while Glenn and Cunningham note that magical Negroes are unable to use their gifts to help themselves. (544; 142).

They look at you the way you look at them," she told me bluntly. "You don't know who those children are. Maybe they're nasty and silly and hateful. Maybe not. You don't know what happens to them when they go home. You don't know who their daddies or mamas or their people are, why they do things, or what they're scared of. You think because they wear different clothes than you and go by so fast they're rich and cruel and thinking terrible things about you. Could be they're looking at you sitting up here eating blackberries and looking at them like they're spit on a stove—could be they're jealous of you, hungry for what you got, afraid of what you got, afraid of what you would do if they ever stepped in the yard (262).

In many contemporary novels Magical Lesbians use wealth and social class privilege to heal protagonists, but, as this quote demonstrates, Raylene uses perspective and wisdom.⁴⁵

Through this short speech to Bone, Raylene offers a multifaceted, non-binary view of reality, as she explains to Bone there are many possibilities for what the rich children are thinking and experiencing. Through her more experienced perspective, Raylene offers Bone a way to cope with anger at circumstances she cannot control. For most of the text, other adult characters claim that Raylene's wisdom and strength come from her isolation (rather than in spite of it). Other characters' perceptions of Raylene as happy function to confirm their own binary maps of the world—happy/not happy; alone/not alone—while when Raylene reveals her wounds to Bone, Bone gets to see Raylene (and the world at large) as multidimensional and complex instead of either/or (297).

However, when Raylene talks about how she lives (after Bone has insulted Raylene's choice to live alone without men or children and to wear overalls), we see the pain around

⁴⁵ This trend of the wealthy lesbian appears in early 20th century lesbian novels such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* (1936) as well as in pulp fiction such as Valerie Taylor's *The Girls in 3-B* (1959). Taylor's *Girls in 3-B* features an early Magical Lesbian prototype as the secondary lesbian in the text takes in a protagonist in her 20s who is being repeatedly raped by her landlord. The trope of the wealthy lesbian has returned in early 21st century contemporary novels as evidenced by texts such as Wally Lamb's *We Are Water* (2013) and Jodi Picoult's *Sing You Home* (2011).

her isolation:

"I know what I have to do and what I don't. You think about it, and you'll see that the biggest part of why I live the way I do is that out here I can do just about anything I damn well please."...Aunt Raylene's face was beet-red, and her eyes were not on me. There were looking past the highway. She seemed like she wanted to cry almost as much as I did, but like me, wasn't going to let herself (259).

Raylene is often shown looking in the distance, out past the highway or the river, which I argue suggests longing rather than contentment. For example, Bone remarks:

She [Raylene] wrapped her arms around her knees and looked off down the river. I saw her do that a lot, sit out there and stare into the distance. She always seemed completely comfortable with herself, elbows locked around her knees and one hand drawn up to smoke. Sometimes she'd hum softly (183).

In this moment, Raylene is curled into her body, making herself small, lost in thoughts. The position itself does not suggest comfort with one's self as much as it suggests self-soothing. I argue that Bone's perception has been colored by her other aunts who present Raylene as having something no one else does. Thus Raylene's sexual difference gets translated into an advantage, while bringing a quality associated with lesbianism—living apart—out in the open and keeping her lesbianism unspoken and invisible. The thing no one will speak of becomes something which others admire. Yet this is simply the reverse of being ostracized for her sexuality. The consequences of Raylene's sexuality—being alone, having few friends—are ignored. Similarly, Raylene's sisters ignore the way the impossibility of Raylene having a relationship benefits them, in the form of free childcare. Thus, Raylene's supposed self-contentment is a projection by other characters which Raylene herself helps makes possible with her secrecy. At the end of the novel Raylene reveals her deep wounds from her lost love with another woman, but she only shares this information with Bone. Like the empty space in front of Raylene's house with the torn out vines and cut down bushes, which gives Raylene a view of anyone approaching her property, Raylene's secrecy

lets her see other characters without being seen herself. Yet there is a price for this: she remains unseen by her sisters as they project contentment and happiness onto her. In other words, no characters in the text ever express concern for Raylene, while family members worry about her sisters Ruth and Anney, which results in them receiving care. Bone goes to live with Ruth for a month to help her; Raylene takes over for Anney in dealing with Glen and protecting Bone. Here we see the interaction of the lesbian invisibility-visibility dialogic-dialectic with feminine carework, as the tension Raylene faces because of her sexual difference shifts her relationship to carework. The projections of Raylene as independent and content come from her inhabiting the space within the invisibility-visibility dialogic-dialectic which means that Raylene is cut out of reciprocal caring between the women in the family: she gives care but does not receive it. Raylene moves between these modes of perception and projection. She constantly negotiates the heteronormative world and inhabits straight women's fantasies of liberation from the heteronormative. But the Boatwright women have created an idealized version of lesbianism: by equating lesbianism with self-contentment, Raylene's sisters present lesbianism as an idealized, overly simplistic freedom from patriarchy while ignoring the fact that Raylene ran away to the circus to find a lover rather than having one close to home.

Coinciding with Raylene's representation as a caregiver but not a care-receiver is her gender performance, which I argue, functions as a disidentification with femininity. Aunt Raylene may represent an ideal independence for other characters in the text, but her gender performance is used to authenticate other characters' femininity. Judith Butler notes that "under the conditions of normative heterosexuality, policing gender is

sometimes used as a way of securing heterosexuality" (Bodies, xii). However, Aunt Raylene's gender performance is not so much policed as it is used to secure other women's appearance as feminine. Yet, like Shug, Aunt Raylene plays with masculinity and femininity by embodying both. For example, Bone notes that:

Uncle Earle told me...she had run off with a guy who drove for the carnival...Butch told me that Raylene had worked for the carnival like a man, cutting off her hair and dressing in overalls. She'd called herself Ray, and with her short, stocky build, big shoulders, and small breasts, I could easily see how no one had questioned her...She'd come home to live her life alone...still kept her gray hair cut short, and wore trousers as often as skirts. She only had a few friends, all equally quiet private people. Her only social activity seemed to be a weekly card game with the widowed choir director and two of the local schoolteachers (179).

The story of Raylene's transformation into Ray the carnival worker highlights the performativity of gender. Yet Bone notes that Raylene's body—small breasts, broad shoulders—made this a successful performance in that people believed Ray's appearance signified male biology. Representing a lesbian character with masculine body traits is a stereotypical representation which highlights the connection between gendered bodies and heterosexual desire. As Judith Butler notes,

through the surface politics of the body...acts and gestures, articulated and enacted desires create the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core, an illusion discursively maintained for the purposes of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality (Bodies 173).

In other words, the binary gender system causes us to mistake surface gestures for psychological traits in order to shape bodies to match ideals about heterosexuality. That Raylene passed for Ray suggests that she embodies a space between the binary of masculine and feminine (a pattern we will see repeated in May, the Magical Lesbian I discuss in Chapter 4). We are used to seeing lesbians represented in bodies that do not completely adhere to feminine norms; in fact, Irving argues that "the manifestations of

Raylene's lesbianism are comically stereotypical" (96). Perhaps Raylene's physical appearance—short gray hair and overalls—is stereotypical, but Raylene's mannerisms show Raylene as able to embody multiple gender registers at once. For example Bone notices all this about Raylene:

I watched her shift her hips in her overalls. She was as big around as Aunt Alma but moved as easily and gracefully as a young boy (180).

I watched her light a cigarette the same way Uncle Earle did, striking the match against her thumbnail (182).

She laughed loud, with great enthusiasm, and spit to the side in a way I had never seen a grown woman do before (180).

In these examples, Bone distinguishes herself as observer of gender performativity by the repetition of the phrase "I watched her." Bone sees Raylene as a woman, yet notices she is different because of the ways she performs gender with her body. Similar to Shug, Raylene offers a destabilization of gender binaries by combining masculine and feminine behaviors. While Shug does this with language, Raylene's play is through her performative gestures. There is a queering taking place in these moments as Raylene's repeated acts and gestures, because they deviate from the feminine norm, suggest that gender is fluid rather than fixed. This is one way Magical Lesbians are not used to reproduce heteropatriarchy, as they instead destabilize the ideology of fixed genders.

Yet this destabilization of the gender system can be subtly co-opted, even as it disrupts. For example, Raylene's brother, Earle, tells Bone that when Raylene was a teenager, one of her sisters, Carr, kept:

insisting Raylene had to learn to use makeup and fix her hair, start working on getting herself a man. But I always thought she just went on at Raylene so she could boast about how hard she worked at looking good (89).

Carr draws attention to the fact that Raylene refuses the labor involved in performing feminine body appearance—using makeup and hairstyles—but uses Raylene's resistance to prove her own femininity. Femininity becomes associated with work again, but this time the work is not caretaking for others, but the labor involved in creating feminine appearance.⁴⁶ Earle says that Carr is jealous that her other sisters are prettier than she is, so in this story, Carr uses Raylene to define and assert her own femininity. Carr's "othering" so she can adhere to social norms of femininity evokes the importance of visible non-conformance to femininity. In other words, Allison presents feminine beauty as a product of labor and as a performance. Carr has to work at being feminine (and thus beautiful) while Raylene's non-feminine appearance offers Carr normative gender security. However, the text as a whole queers and classes normative femininity by exposing it as a marker of leisure, as the other female bodies in the text are described as worn down by feminine carework. In other words, working class femininity is non-normative as the feminine labor required of working class women erodes middle-class femininity from their bodies. Allison marks the costs of caring labor on the bodies of women in the texts by contrasting the aunts and uncles appearance as they age.

My aunts treated my uncles like over-grown boys...[my uncles] looked young, even Nevil, who'd had his teeth knocked out, while the aunts—Ruth, Raylene, Alma, and even Mama—seemed old, worn-down, and slow, born to mother, nurse, and clean up after the men (23).

Feminized carework is intertwined with womanhood in these sentences, and carework is also shown to leave a record on women's bodies that can be seen when contrasting their

⁴⁶ Raylene's tightrope gender performance takes precision and practice. I am reminded of Muñoz's work on queer gestures as he writes of his own attempts to appear less feminine as a young boy "I was a spy in the house of gender normativity, and like any spy, I was extremely careful and worried my cover would be blown" (Cruising 68).

bodies with men's. Butler argues that "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of the body" (xv). *Bastard* shows the role of social class in feminine appearance norms: When Butler's gender performativity interacts with the economic realities of rural poverty, feminine carework expectations reveal different femininities, ones that are non-normative, abject, cronish and considered dangerous. Carr, the sister who is shown putting the most labor into her appearance, is absent from this passage. She has used feminine appearance as an out from feminine carework as she lives a middle-class life in Baltimore, far from the extended family.

Raylene, like many Magical Lesbians, performs femininity through caring labor. In fact, Raylene teaches this labor to Bone, thus once again showing that there is a lesbian presence already within the framework of reproductive heterosexuality.⁴⁷ Raylene's house is described as "scrubbed clean" (181). Raylene's brother claims that Raylene "makes the best chow-chow in the state" (180). This femininity is also connected to both geographic longevity as it marks the Boatwrights as people who have been in South Carolina for generations and to hybridity as chow-chow historically is believed to have roots in Chinese cuisine and be and passed on from Chinese laborers building railroads (Egerton 15). That Raylene makes the best chow-chow is an argument for the importance of queer labor within the extended heterosexual family, both in the present moment and for futurity, as Raylene passes this tradition onto her nieces. Interestingly, while Raylene herself challenges gender norms with her appearance and employment (she works at the mill for years and now pulls trash from the river and sells it by the side of the road), she is never

⁴⁷ The gendered division of household labor is a hallmark of reproductive heterosexual family organization.

shown trying to get her male relatives to participate in feminized carework.

Even though Raylene teaches Bone and her sister Reese to cook (and thus perform feminized labor), she helps Bone develop self-esteem through praising her for not being too feminine thus disidentifying with the dependence associated with femininity. (As I argued earlier, female dependence/interdependence is not available to Raylene because of her sexual difference.) When she tells Bone she has a "good eye" for pulling useable trash from the river, Bone thinks "I loved her praise more than the money, loved being good at something, loved hearing Aunt Raylene tell Uncle Beau what a worker I was" (182). When Aunt Raylene watches Bone climb a tree, she compliments Bone on how sure she is on her feet and not being scared of falling in the river. When Bone says "Why should I be?...A little river water an't gonna hurt me," Raylene responds by telling Bone about one of her female cousins who was afraid of the river, thus boosting Bone's self-esteem even more (182). Yet when Raylene teaches Bone how to cook, she compliments Bone's adherence to working class feminine norms. While Bone is canning peaches, her mother says "You want these peaches to boil over?...You got to watch this stuff close" (187) But Aunt Raylene counters this with "Ah, Anney, Bone's the best you got, works like a dog she does, just like you and me" (188). After complimenting Bone, and slightly chiding Anney, Raylene distracts Anney from her criticism by talking about one of their sisters. But Anney returns to critiquing Bone's canning, noting that she does not "think those jars are setting deep enough in that pot" (189) Once again Raylene defends Bone, saying "Oh Anney. Bone's doing a good job. When she grows up, she's gonna know all she'll need about canning and cooking and gossiping in the kitchen" (189). Here Raylene points out that Bone is feminine enough because she can perform feminine carework well enough. Taken with the scene by the

river, it looks like Raylene is teaching Bone to do feminine labor but not to "act like a girl" when it comes to exploring the river and thus the world.

Raylene disidentifies with feminine behavior by consciously picking and choosing which types of femininity to embody. Like Shug, because Raylene is conscious of the performativity of gender, she can develop what would be categorized as both masculine and feminine abilities. What I find remarkable is that Raylene uses this gender fluidity to moor herself to her very heteronormative family. In a sense, Raylene becomes indispensable to the family as a whole because she provides childcare and adult care but does not receive care. In other words, her presence results in care for the family system which is free in every sense of the word because it does not have to be reciprocated. Since Raylene is different, she can be exploited, and thus tolerated, within the Boatwright family's emotional and carework economy.

While lesbian representations from the mid-20th century often showed lesbians as predatory and abusive towards female children, Raylene is presented as a diligent caregiver (Faderman 297). Bone, her sister, and her cousins are often competently cared for by Raylene. For example, when Bone's mother leaves Glen a second time, she moves Bone and Reese to an apartment. But Bone walks to Aunt Raylene's house (where Raylene is already hosting her brother whose wife threw him out) and stays for three days, during which time Raylene cooks for her brother and Bone (258). When Raylene babysits for Bone's younger sister Reese during a funeral she teaches Reese how to make "skillet cobbler the way Raylene had learned when she was with the carnival" (261). Here, Raylene queers reproductive futurity not only by passing on a traditional "feminized" skill—making dessert—but by representing this skill differently, as she frames it as coming from

her days with the carnival. While it is possible to view Raylene's transfer of feminine domestic caring skills to the younger generation as solely lesbian domestication, I argue that Raylene's caregiving in this case disrupts heteronormative futurity because she provides an alternative to heteronormativity. Raylene passed for male at the carnival and had a female lover there, thus the carnival, for her, represents a queer utopia. Furthermore, the movement of the carnival from town to town shifts cobbler—a dessert associated with the home—to a domesticity which can be accessed on the road. Raylene passing this skill onto her niece suggests a queer futurity which disrupts ideas of cobblers (and thus feminine caretaking) as static and moored to kitchens.

Even as Raylene provides childcare, her home is a respite for other female characters to avoid the feminine expectation of childcare. One of Bone's cousins visits Raylene because caring for her disabled younger sister "gets on my nerves...I'd rather pull weeds for Aunt Raylene any day" (183). So even as Raylene teaches the performance of femininity, other characters use her home as an escape from the responsibilities of performing working class femininity. On the other hand, Raylene's male nephews use Raylene's home to be able to express masculinity in ways that do not offend heterosexual women. Thus Raylene's rejection of social norms is also presented as advantageous for the family men. They are comfortable with her as "her house was where the older boy cousins tended to go...they could smoke and curse and roughhouse without interference" (178). Thus Raylene's rejection of men as a sexual partners is paired with her not caring how they behave—to an extent. Raylene has no tolerance for male abuse of women.

Raylene's Touch & Attempts to Stop Victim Blaming

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Raylene is the one voice in *Bastard* that challenges victim blaming both verbally and with compassionate touch. While both Anney and Bone often counter Raylene's verbal insistence they are not to blame, it is Raylene's compassionate touch that unleashes shame as it viscerally reveals the truth that Bone and Anney are not to blame for Glen's behavior. This is a pattern with Magical Lesbian characters which we saw in Chapter 2 when Shug's touch let Celie release her emotions about her abuse and we will see it repeated in Chapter 4. In *Bastard*, the first glimpse of the power of Raylene's touch comes at after a funeral, while the entire family is gathered at Alma's house and Raylene discovers the marks from Glen's latest beating. She shows this to Bone's uncles, who find Glen at the party and beat him. As Bone hears the uncles find Glen, Raylene uses touch to sooth:

"No," I pleaded. "Aunt Raylene, please!" But she just held me tight. I turned, started punching her, trying to get free. Mama's arms came around me so suddenly I almost stopped breathing (246).

Here Bone and Anney reject Raylene's touch because she has revealed too much. As the uncles beat Glen, Raylene keeps trying to physically comfort Anney and Bone.

"Oh, Anney." Raylene reached for Mama's hands, but Mama pulled away. "Don't touch me. Don't." Mama almost spit. She drew me closer to her. I was shaking in her arms, and she was shaking too. "Oh God, Raylene, I'm so ashamed. I couldn't stop him, and then...I don't know" (246).

Anney rejects Raylene's touch because Raylene's sight has revealed Bone's abuse. For Anney, Raylene's ability and willingness to respond to what Anney feels helpless to fix—that is, Bone's abuse—makes Raylene's touch unbearable for Bone. Even with the reality of Bone's abuse revealed, the cause remains clouded. Bone rejects Raylene's touch as she

rejects any explanation other than she has caused the beating. As Bone believes this she physically clings to her mother and pushes Raylene away:

"Mama, I whimpered, and tried to push up to her. "I made him mad, I did."

"Bone." Raylene reached for me.

"*No!*" I jerked away and pressed my face against Mama's arm.

"Hush. Hush." Mama breathed. I held still and heard Raylene's hand drop (247).

Raylene's sight has already revealed the schism between Bone and her mother. I believe her touch becomes unbearable because of this revelation. Bone's two uses of the word "no" in this scene directed at Raylene are both in italics, while no other text in this scene is marked this way. Pairing italics with "no" emphasizes that Raylene has revealed too much and that Bone is facing her own helplessness in being abused. Dale and Porter note that victims of violence "find it preferable to accept blame, and the guilt that entails, than to admit the possibility that life is capricious and unfair" (140). Thus Bone's self-blame is protective and provides her with an illusion of control over unbearable circumstances. At the very end of the scene, as the three of them hear Glen thudding against the wall as Bone's uncles beat him, Anney and Raylene form a pyramid around Bone. "I looked up. Above me Mama's face and Raylene's were almost touching, both of them trembling and holding on as if their lives depended on each other" (247). Once the physicality of Glen's encounter with the uncles takes over the scene, Raylene's touch becomes acceptable. Anney and Raylene no longer fight to physically comfort Bone, instead they encase her. After the beating, when Glen has been taken to the hospital and the uncles are recovering, Raylene offers her place to Anney, but Anney refuses. Anney's other sister, Alma, offers help, which Anney ignores. Raylene pleads with Anney to listen to them, but Anney refuses both their touch and their help. "She kept putting one hand up, palm out, when either of her

sisters got too close" (255). Because of Anney's shame, Raylene and Alma's touch is too much for her.

After the funeral, Anney leaves Glen again and moves Bone and Reese to an apartment in town.⁴⁸ Raylene continues to offer advice to change Bone's perspective on why Glen beats her. Already Raylene has shifted Bone's perception of herself to "hard worker," something Bone does not think anyone else even sees about her.

Aunt Raylene told me not to brood, that it would take time for Mama to forgive herself. For what? I wondered. Mama hadn't done anything wrong. I was the one who made Daddy Glen mad. I was the one who made everybody crazy. No, Raylene told me. I wasn't to think that way. She had whispered in a rough, strained voice that Mama loved me, that she loved me, that Earle and my uncles loved me. She was insistent, holding me tight to her, but I didn't listen...It was my fault, all my fault. I had ruined everything (250).

Here, Raylene once again comforts Bone as she offers an alternate explanation—Glen is at fault, not Bone. While the uncles beating Glen is part of a retributive male honor code, (which usually places shame onto women), Raylene disrupts this by emphasizing Bone's innocence. This disrupts the heteronormative model of patriarchal rule, of child beating as biblical discipline correction.⁴⁹ Of course, Bone's abuse is so extreme it is obvious that this is not "discipline." Yet Bone's understanding of the abuse is a common one, perpetrated by

⁴⁸ The funeral is for Aunt Ruth, another of Bone's aunts who has died from cancer.

⁴⁹ Books such as Michael and Debbie Pearls' *To Train up a Child* (1994), Gary and Anne Marie Ezzo's *Let Children Come Along the Virtuous Way* (2002), and James Dobson's *Dare to Discipline* (1982) use the bible as justification for both patriarchal rule and physical discipline. In fact, the Pearls' book has been linked with numerous child deaths, as is noted by Beth Felker Jones "Spanking Away Sin." *The Christian Century*, Vol 124.9; Jeff Hodson "Did Hana's parents 'train' her to death?" *The Seattle Times*, Nov. 27, 2011.

patriarchal rape culture.⁵⁰ In Bone's family, Raylene is the only one who will talk about Glen's abuse and say that it is not Bone's fault. When Bone blames herself to her mother, Anney tells Bone to hush, but she does not repeat Raylene's you-are-not-to-blame (247). As Raylene shows little interest in participating in the heteronormative theater of the family in the role of "biological mother" but is willing to be "aunt" and "sister," perhaps her willingness and ability to counter Bone and Anney's self-blame stem from her outsider status.

But, both Bone and Anney reject Raylene's version of events. After Anney has moved out, she will not even let Raylene in her new house.

When Aunt Raylene came over, Mama didn't even invite her inside, just spoke through the door.

"Let us be, Raylene. Just let me be for a while. I need some time to think."

"Anney, you can't hide away like you some criminal." Aunt Raylene sounded impatient. "You an't the one done nothing wrong. You an't the one at fault."

"I don't care who's at fault," Mama yelled. "I just need to be left alone!"

Anney cannot even bear to have the belief that she is not at fault brought into her home. Is this job, the role of speaking unpleasant truths, left to lesbian characters because they have different stakes in the participation and disruption of heteronormative family structures? Anney cannot afford (emotionally or financially) to live apart from a man and refuses Raylene's help. Even though both Anney and Raylene are poor, Raylene has a financial and ethical freedom from compulsory heterosexuality that Anney does not. However, this analysis runs the risk of presenting Raylene's sexuality as advantageous. While Raylene can afford to see things Anney cannot, it is not until the end of the novel that her sexuality is revealed (300). All of the queer characters Raylene associates with are single. So while

⁵⁰ See Moya Frese & J. L. Megius "Social Perception of Rape: How Rape Myth Acceptance Modulates the Influence of Situational Factors." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 19(2) pp 143 - 161.

Raylene disrupts heterosexuality by presenting abuse in its context as psychologically and physically damaging, the alternative, queerness, comes across as solitary and connected to servitude: Raylene's only three friends outside of her family are a widowed choir director and two school teachers (179). Though these are not service professions per se, these queer characters are in the business of serving others' educational, artistic, and spiritual needs. Yet it emerges from the text that compulsory heterosexuality—Anney's emotional and economic need for a man—makes it impossible for her to confront the reality of Glen's abuse. But it takes a character who lives on the edge of town and fishes trash out of the river who has lost love to reveal this truth. This tells us that it is expensive to see the costs of compulsory heterosexuality. So expensive that only a character already tangentially released from its system can do it.

Accepting Raylene's Touch

At the end of the text, after Glen has been beaten by Bone's uncles, Glen brutally rapes Bone. While recovering in the hospital, Bone accepts Raylene's touch and simultaneously becomes a Boatwright.⁵¹ Through being photographed in the newspaper and put into her Aunt Alma's album of Boatwright photos, Bone feels a sense of belonging to her extended family, as is evidenced by the following:

I was leaning against Raylene's shoulder, my face all pale and long, my chin sticking out too far, my eyes sunk into shadows. I was a Boatwright there for sure, as ugly as anything (293).

⁵¹ Thus the Boatwright family is not inherently abusive or heteronormative. The other open cultural secret this novel reveals is that there are perhaps many Raylenes in people's families.

Bone's recognition of herself as a Boatwright "for sure" coincides with accepting Aunt Raylene's touch. Right before the photo is taken, Raylene appears at the hospital to stop the sheriff from pressuring Bone into speaking about being rape. In this moment, Bone reaches for Raylene's touch, instead of resisting it as she has previously, "Raylene leaned over me, and the smell of her wrapped me around. I opened my mouth like a baby bird, cried out, and reached up to her with my good arm" (297). Raylene stops the sheriff's inquiry, appealing to divine justice over social justice, while acknowledging the re-traumatization of Bone telling her story to the sheriff. To the sheriff Raylene says:

She's just twelve years old, you fool. Right now she needs to feel safe and loved, not alone and terrified. You're right, there has to be justice. There has to be a judgment day too, when God will judge us all. What you gonna tell him you did to this child when the day comes? (298)

Here Aunt Raylene weighs the re-traumatization that will occur if Bone has to tell the sheriff about being raped versus justice. While Raylene agrees "there has to be justice" in the next sentence she connects the justice of prosecuting Glen to divine justice from God. Is Raylene suggesting that Glen will get what's due to him when the time comes, so it is not worth re-traumatizing Bone? Or is Raylene protecting Bone from being even more outcast if the whole story appearing in the papers?

Aunt Raylene acts as Bone's guardian in the hospital. She stays with Bone overnight, and when Bone is released from the hospital,

I could see the photographer waiting outside, but Raylene just harrumphed and picked me up like a baby doll, not looking to the left or right as she carried me out to her truck. Raylene settled me close to her right hip before she started the engine, but I slid away, over to where I could hang on to the door and look out through the window. I could not look in her direction, could not listen to the words she kept trying to speak in my direction...The one thing I wanted her to say went unspoken. Where was Mama? (300).

Raylene once again protects Bone from outsiders, this time the photographer instead of the sheriff. Yet this is not enough to protect Bone from the trauma. Like the previous scenes, when Glen's abuse comes to the forefront, Bone cannot tolerate Raylene's touch as a substitute mother, even as the text and story present her as performing more mothering than Bone's mother. Even the way Raylene lifts Bone "like a baby doll" suggests she is a more powerful mother than Anney. As Bone rejects Raylene's touch, Raylene reveals her wound to her. This is a moment that occurs in *The Color Purple* as well. When Celie is so hurt she cannot get out of bed, Shug tells Celie the story of her wound. Is there something magical in a lesbian telling a protagonist about her wound? Raylene's gendered telling in this moment evokes the *testimonio* form as it also reveals that Raylene is not as content as she seems:

Well, I had me a friend when I was with the carnival, somebody I loved better than myself, a lover I would have spent my life with and should have. But I was crazy with love, too crazy to judge what I was doing. I did a terrible thing, Bone." Her skin looked tighter over her cheekbones, as if her whole frame were swelling with shame..."Bone, no woman can stand to choose between her baby and her lover, between her child and her husband. I made the woman I loved choose. She stayed with her baby, and I came back here alone. It should have never come to that...It just about killed her. It just about killed me (300).

This personal revelation from a character who seems to be independent and self-sufficient is similar to Shug's confession to Celie that she wants to be married. These moments show Magical Lesbians as characters who use their own longing for connection and intimacy to facilitate emotional healing for protagonists.

Bone stays with Raylene as she heals. Raylene cares for Bone and offers her feminine labor to aid in the healing, such as picking through beans and mending curtains

which again evokes Celie using sewing to heal from the anger (304).⁵² It is Raylene's teaching and wisdom which lets Bone deal with and forgive her mother. When Bone's mother finally comes to talk to Bone, Bone begins to have flashbacks of her rape and her mother forgiving Glen afterwards, but Raylene's wisdom brings her back so she can be present and listen to her mother:

I could...feel that black despair whose only relief would be death...Maybe it wasn't her fault. It wasn't mine. Maybe it wasn't a matter of anybody's fault. Maybe it was like Raylene said, the way the world goes, the way hearts get broken all the time (307).

The novel ends with Anney backing away from Raylene's physical presence, then Bone and Raylene holding hands on the porch after Anney leaves.

Conclusion

While Chapter 2 examined ways Shug from *The Color Purple* acted as a Magical Lesbian to rescue the protagonist from an abusive marriage, provide her with sexual and spiritual liberation, and help her achieve economic self-sufficiency, this chapter explored Magical Lesbian temporality and feminine gender performance. I argued that Raylene disidentified with femininity as she performs feminine carework but embodied both masculine and feminine physical traits. Similar to the Magical Lesbian's dual embodiment of gender(s), secondary lesbian characters both support and disrupt heteronormative family structures. Raylene is an example of the dialectic between representations of lesbian domestication and lesbian resistance, as we cannot claim her as wholly ensnared in reproductive heteronormative nor wholly resistant to it. Instead, Raylene queers reproductive futurity

⁵² Sewing is a trope for healing and womanhood in the literature of trauma, such as Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of the Bones*, Lorna Goodison's *From Harvey River* and Donnette Francis' essay on Goodison "The Last Stitch."

even as her labor is absorbed completely by the extended family network. In Chapter 4, I will continue to explore the dialectic of lesbian domestication-resistance with May, a Magical Lesbian from Louise Erdrich's 2011 novel *Shadow Tag*. Though Aunt Raylene becomes Bone's primary caregiver by the end of *Bastard*, she provides secondary care throughout most of the text. With Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*, we see a May who, with her female partner, is raising four children. By the end of *Shadow Tag*, when May's sister commits suicide, May will adopt three more children. I use *Shadow Tag* to explore theories of lesbian mothering which point out that while lesbians with children are often read as co-opted by heteronormativity they have a complex relationship to reproductive futurity. As representations of secondary lesbian mothers (both biological and adoptive) in contemporary North American fiction have become increasingly popular since 2009, *Shadow Tag* provides a fascinating case study of ways the image of the lesbian is both co-opted by gendered mothering expectations as it simultaneously disrupts them.

CHAPTER FOUR

TIME IS RELATIVE: AUNT MAY & DIALOGISM IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *SHADOW TAG*

Introduction

In the last chapter I examined Aunt Raylene's queer feminine care throughout *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and I argued that Aunt Raylene demonstrated Magical Lesbian presence through substitute parenting. Aunt Raylene's character intervenes on previous queer theorizing on reproductive futurity and suggests that there is a unique lesbian thread running through reproductive futurity, as feminized lesbian caretaking reveals a queer futurity that is already enmeshed with heteronormative reproductive futurity.⁵³ In this chapter, I focus on how Aunt May, the Magical Lesbian from Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*, both protects and disrupts heteronormative ideas of reproductive futurity by revealing the constructedness of their boundaries. In other words, simply acknowledging the boundaries of reproductive futurity is to show its constructedness and destabilizes it by revealing the constructs of family, mothering, and temporality as socially created. Yet Magical Lesbians also affirm these boundaries by offering protagonists a means to function within them albeit with the new knowledge that these boundaries are permeable. The reparative function then of Magical Lesbian characters is to shift the relationship of woman

⁵³ I use Lee Edelman's definition of reproductive futurism here: "the means by which specific constituencies attempt to produce a more desirable social order, remains, at its core, conservative insofar as it works to *affirm* a structure, to *authenticate* social order, which it then intends to transmit to the future in the form of its inner Child. That Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention" (2-3, emphasis original). However, as I point out in chapter 3, Edelman's claim that "queerness names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children'" excludes queer women from queerness, as due to feminine caring norms, we partake in childcare. Thus I contend that reproductive futurity itself has been queered by lesbian caring.

protagonists to family and temporal constructs without challenging the constructs themselves. Indeed, we might view Magical Lesbians as revealing the dependence of familial and temporal constructs on being perceived as natural. Merely to look at them straight on is enough to cause them to waver. Furthermore, Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag* offers a narrative that intertwines constructs of race among the temporal and the familial.

Part epistolary, part third person omniscient narration, Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag* parallels individual trauma with cultural trauma as we see half-Ojibwa Irene America exploited by her husband, Gil. One-quarter Chippewa, Gil builds his career on painting only Irene in humiliating, grotesque, and pornographic poses. Irene researches George Caitlin, a 19th century white painter whose native subjects often died after he painted them. Gil beats their three children (Florian, Riel, and Stoney) as well as Irene (whom he also sexually assaults). May, the Magical Lesbian of the novel, is Irene's half sister. May talks to Irene about Gil, helps Irene file for divorce, and attempts to get Irene to stop drinking. During a family trip, Gil commits suicide in Lake Superior and Irene drowns attempting to save him. Afterwards, it is May who takes in their three children. May is different from previous Magical Lesbians in this study as she has a long-term partner for the entire text and a biological son who lives with her part time. As other Magical Lesbians suffer from heartbreak and thus are able to connect and help other women in the text because of their experience with suffering, May stands out because she rescues without ever revealing her own past traumas. When May describes her love life to Irene she says "Bobbi's got kids too. Three. It's good, stable, you know. We're in love. Finally[...]I was into...you know" (69). May's "you know" is never revealed. Thus instead of helping other women through trauma by a shared experience of trauma (like Aunt Raylene and Shug), May helps other characters

from a place of stability. There are many mentions of May's stability throughout the text. For example, Irene thinks that May's handwriting "indicated a stable and reliable nature" while May and Bobbi have "the relief of a stable holiday" (75; 235). May's perceived stability makes her similar to the other Magical Lesbians in this study as Irene projects something she desires for herself – stability – onto May. Similar projections – where other characters romanticize personality traits in Magical Lesbians - occur both in *The Color Purple* and *Bastard Out of Carolina* as Aunt Raylene sister's, Ruth, thinks that Raylene is "the only person any of us would ever meet who was completely satisfied with her own company" Celie envies the way "Shug talk and act sometimes like a man" (81; 179).

In structuring this chapter, I put my analysis of Riel's (May's niece and Irene's daughter) point of view (POV) first, as contending with Riel's omniscient POV sets the stage for May's role as a temporal guide throughout the text. As I will argue in this chapter, Riel's omniscience (as opposed to a close third or close first narration we see in *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *The Color Purple*) lends polyvocality to the text, as she uses her voice to present various close third person narrations that shifts from character to character. Furthermore, I argue that Riel's omniscient voice, which May facilitates, represents a queered narrative space. By queered, I do not mean just Michael Warner's definition of queer as oppositional to any normative construct (not just heterosexuality) (xxvi), but Anne-Marie Fortier's conception of queer subjects as "multiple and diverse in all contexts, by virtue of their gender, class, ethnic, generational positions" (186). I next return to May's character and come to an answer to the question I began this study with: why are these rescuing secondary characters so often lesbian? As May demonstrates, lesbian characters appear to have a different relation to time than heterosexual characters. Their temporality

challenges a central tenet of chrono-normativity: motherhood.⁵⁴ Jack Halberstam argues that children are inherently queer and not chrono-normative, and mothers, because women are primarily responsible for childcare, are given the task of raising heterosexual and chrono-normative children (Failure 76). However, it is important to note that mothers' connections to normative sexual and temporal disciplining are not due to individual prejudices, but are intertwined with feminine caretaking norms. In other words, regardless of how an individual mother may feel about queer sexual identity, enacting feminized care is likely to support heterosexuality and linear time. For example, Halberstam explains, "family time refers to the normative scheduling of daily life (early to bed, early to rise) that accompanies the practice of child rearing," showing that normative temporality is intertwined with cultural heterosexual motherhood norms (5 *Queer Time*). Furthermore, Freeman explains that temporal disciplining is tied up with heterosexual families, which in turn support "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (Freeman 3).

May begins *Shadow Tag* with one biological son, three adopted children she raises with her partner, and ends the text with three more adopted children. I argue that May offers a representation of mothering that is neither heterosexual nor lesbian, but fluid and shifting based on a situation. In other words, May presents motherhood as dialogic. The dialogic theorizes that the meaning of texts shifts both based on who is reading them, what cultural systems the texts interact with, and what other texts they are read with. In the case of dialogic motherhood, I argue that mother is not a biological imperative but rather a

⁵⁴ I use chrono-normativity here to refer to sequential, linear models of time that are connected to social and heterosexual reproduction which Elizabeth Freeman points out are used to "organize individual human bodies towards maximum productivity" (3). In this chapter I will focus connections between chrono-normativity and motherhood.

culturally understood set of behaviors relative to childcare that is dynamic and in constant interaction with cultural systems, sexual, class, gender, and racial identities. Furthermore, I use dialogic here in the Bakhtinian sense to mean that while motherhood is part of the larger construct of family, its meaning is fluid, and shifts depending on context (426).⁵⁵ Thus, I argue that May demonstrates that there are alternative ways to think about mothering that change expectations of mothers from both queer and heterosexual perspectives. Using Judith Roof's idea of mothering as behavior rather than identity as a jumping off point, I claim that mothering need not be the ticket into normative femininity (for lesbian, bi, or straight women), but can instead model a way to explore different temporal models and boundaries. Finally, I investigate a central question of the novel – the meaning of a moment – and investigate how May facilitates a queering of the moment. In this section, I compare May and Irene's experiences of chrono-normativity. While Irene unsuccessfully attempts to use a journal to rewrite her past in order to change the present, May resolutely rewrites her past and present by shifting her relationship to social constructs of family. Similar to Aunt Raylene's refusal to use the subjunctive to describe the future, May's use of simple present tense indicates a queered futurity.

Criticism on Louise Erdrich

There is little critical work specifically on *Shadow Tag*, thus this section covers general criticism on Louise Erdrich. Like all the texts I analyze in this project, form is at the

⁵⁵ Furthermore, this construct of motherhood as fluid, even while it still interacts with social constructs of Western families impacts narrative structure. As Bakhtin notes when writing about chronotopes and time in the novel that the "family novel" shifts from folkloric time, which is more circular, to linear temporal models based on genealogy (231). I will further address directions for future research on ways Magical Lesbian temporality interacts with family temporality in the conclusion.

center of criticism of Louise Erdrich's writing. Similar to how Dorothy Allison has been questioned for whether *Bastard Out of Carolina* is fiction or autobiography, a central debate among reviewers of *Shadow Tag* is the relationship of the novel to Erdrich's own life. Even when reviewers claim it is poor practice to link a fictional text to Erdrich's biography, they themselves still do. For example, Ron Charles writing in the *Washington Post* calls *Shadow Tag* "a tense little masterpiece of marital strife that recalls her tragic relationship with the poet Michael Dorris...for all its voyeuristic temptations 'Shadow Tag' is no roman á clef, no act of spousal revenge on her estranged husband" (Charles np). Charles undermines his own claim that *Shadow Tag* is not a roman á clef by first pointing out the narrative's similarity to Erdrich's own life. But Leah Hager Cohen writing in the *New York Times* claims "we miss something if we approach this book simply as fiction" then goes on to compare biographical facts with the narrative. However, even as Hager Cohen acknowledges, "it's a fools' errand to parse fact from fiction" she blames Erdrich, stating that she "seeded her narrative with what feels like an imperative to do so" (np). Hager Cohen then devotes another paragraph to the character she thinks contains this seed: May, the Magical Lesbian. In the hard cover version, the Magical Lesbian is named Louise. Yet, in the paperback, which came out a year later, the Magical Lesbian's name had been changed to May. Was this Erdrich arguing back to critics and reviewers? In *Prairie Schooner*, James Cihlar also refers to *Shadow Tag* as "a roman á clef" (173). Similar to the *Washington Post* review, critic Padraig Kirwan argues, "that Erdrich reconstitutes and rehashes media accounts of her private life -- rumors and half truths -- in order to take control of the story, to problematize fixed notions about story and half-truths" (155). Thus even when reviewers and critics claim that readers should not be comparing this text to Erdrich's own life, they do exactly

that. Critics demonstrate hypocrisy, mixed expectations, and discrepancies when they engage in the very biographical detective hunts they condemn. There are ramifications when these critics do not practice what they preach: it implies that Erdrich's novel does not warrant serious critical attention and echoes the historical exclusions of women and racial and ethnic minorities from mainstream narrative discourses.

Two reviewers also question whether or not *Shadow Tag* is a novel, as Hager Cohen of the NYT claims that it "seems more like notes for a novel than fully realized fiction" and James Cihlar, reviewing *Shadow Tag* for *Prairie Schooner* writes that it is "a novel of ideas" (173). This trend, wondering whether Louise Erdrich's novels are fiction, is a common one in the general criticism of her other work. I will focus on her historical novels here, as they show how strong this pattern is. As Erdrich herself cannot be inserted into her historical novel, she is critiqued for violating other tenets of the novel. Josh Rubbings says that in *Love Medicine* "traditional novelistic devices -- narrative shape, momentum, suspense...play almost no part in the book's modest cumulative effect" (14). He further states that because of the "often confusing crowd of interrelated characters...seemingly haphazard shifting of close ups" resembles "documentary, cinema verité, rather than full-length fiction." (15). Leslie Marmon Silko argues that Erdrich's *The Beet Queen* violates a tenet of fiction; "good fiction need not be factual, but it doesn't obscure basic truth. In Erdrich's hands, the rural North Dakota of Indian-hating, queer-baiting white farmers, of the Depression, become magically transformed...[her North Dakota] is an oddly rarified place in which the individual's own psyche, not racism or poverty, accounts for all conflict and tension" (180). Silko claims that not only does *The Beet Queen* ignore the effects of racism, poverty, and

homophobia on internal consciousness, but that these misrepresentations of social institutions mean that *The Beet Queen* is a "fairy tale" and not a novel (184).

But other critics come to Erdrich's defense, citing her skillful use of language and praising her representations of Native Americans and her play with the novel form. Nancy Peterson argues that "writers like Erdrich thus face a vexing set of issues: unrepresented or misrepresented in traditional historical narratives, they write their own stories of the past only to discover that they must find a new way of making history" (984). Thus, unlike Silko, Peterson finds Erdrich's unique historicity speaks back to colonization. In a similar vein, Gloria Bird examines how Erdrich's novel *Tracks* provides a counter discourse to colonist representations of Native Americans as "The Savage," a trope that Bird argues is internalized and reified by colonization (41; 46).⁵⁶ Finally, Susan Pérez Castillo also jumps to Erdrich's defense, claiming that Silko's criticism is due to issues of ethnic and literary authenticity: "her differences with Erdrich are apparently rooted in a restrictive view of ethnicity and an essentialist, logocentric concept of textual representation" (285). I am of two minds when it comes to Silko's criticism of *The Beet Queen*. While I see Silko's point that *The Beet Queen* centers on individual psychology so much that it is hard to connect systemic racism, poverty, and homophobia to characters' inner struggles, I also agree with Castillo that Silko's criticism rests in a narrow view of what constitutes fiction. In other words, Silko is right that it is important not to erase histories of oppression in storytelling, but Erdrich's internal focus in *The Beet Queen* does not constitute such an erasure. In fact, I

⁵⁶ According to Robert F. Sayre, " 'savages' are: 1) solitary hunters, rather than farmers; 2) tradition-bound and not susceptible to improvement; 3) childlike innocents who were corrupted by civilization; 4) superstitious pagans who would not accept the highest offerings of civilization like Christianity; and therefore 5) doomed to extinction" qtd in Bird (42).

would argue that Silko's disavowal of *The Beet Queen* could be due to Erdrich's tendency to disidentify with racial and sexual identities.⁵⁷ This tendency comes through strongly in *Shadow Tag*, as the protagonist, Riel, is constantly shifting her relationship to herself as Native American, while Riel's mother, Irene views sexuality as fluid and mutable. In terms of Erdrich's aesthetic tendencies as a writer, they evoke Bakhtin's arguments about the polyvocality and polyphony of the novel, as he refers to the novel as the "most fluid of genres" which is marked by "its stylistic three-dimensionality, which is linked with the multi-linguaged consciousness realized in the novel" (11). Rather than refusing to acknowledge structural racism, homophobia, and poverty, as Silko suggests, Erdrich uses the novel to complicate the relationship of character consciousness to social structures. *The Beet Queen* is polyvocal and polyphonic, as many characters' points of view compose the story and in that readers bring their own perspectives to the text. Readers uncover the systemic issues Silko claims are missing through their own reading and experience of the text. Thus, Erdrich offers readers an experiential rather than a didactic representation of inequality. In the next section, we see how in *Shadow Tag* Erdrich plays with polyvocality by assigning a single, omniscient narrator the responsibility of representing multiple voices. As I will explain, this authorial move also allows Erdrich to use Riel's point of view to direct the readers to the strain between heterosexuality and queerness.

⁵⁷ As I mentioned earlier in this study, the concept of disidentification comes from José Esteban Muñoz's *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (see pages 11-12; 18-19; 30-3). In this chapter I will be Muñoz's disidentification to explore ways that Erdrich simultaneously invokes cultural norms of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality while challenging them, ultimately offering a means to respond to essentialized identities by neither completely conforming to or rejecting them (12).

Riel's Point of View

Halberstam argues that “the child is always already queer and therefore must be quickly converted into a proto-heterosexual by being pushed through a series of maturational models of growth that project the child as the future and the future as heterosexual” (73). Riel’s point of view brings to our attention the tension between heterosexuality and queerness, which for her, gets resolved and integrated. (While for Riel’s mother, Irene, these tensions are unresolvable as she attempts to but cannot free herself from chrono-normativity.) *Shadow Tag* is divided into six sections. Sections I - V are simply numbered and they alternate between an unnamed third person omniscient narrator and Irene's two journals. Once again, Erdrich demonstrates the polyvocality of the novel. She layers multiple voices in such a way that we see three perspectives on Irene (two journals, the third person omniscient narrator). The final section of the text, however, is simply labeled "Riel." In it, Riel reveals what happened after Irene and Gil drowned - in first person. Riel explains, "I am the third person in the writing. I am the one with the gift of omniscience, which is something--I don't know if it's generally known--that children develop once they lose their parents" (251). Thus Riel is suggesting that losing parents - the ones responsible for pulling children into chrono-normativity - thrusts children out of time. Throughout the rest of *Shadow Tag*, Riel speaks of herself in the third person, using the simple past tense. The reader knows they are being told a story after the fact - but not until the final section that breaks both the chapter title patterns and the point of view. The place where this shift occurs is at May and Bobbi's home, where Riel is given the keys to her mother's safe deposit box, which holds her mother's journal (251). Riel as a child struggles towards chrono-normativity - but at May and Bobbi's home she discovers the limits there

are to ordering time, "I stood in the warm dog-smelling kitchen...I was caught in a memory I have had many times. It is always so real I lose track of what's around me and it seems to be happening again" (252). Immediately after this, Riel switches back to third person to show the memory - the moment of calling the rescue service after her parents drowned.

While first person Riel shows us there are ways to be stuck in time, Riel in the third person attempts to re-order time. As a child Riel becomes upset that she can't remember the immediate past "she tried to remember what she had done even one week ago, on the same day, that day was indistinct. Specifics were muddy. Even people" (58). Riel even has trouble remembering her friends and her teachers. Trauma theorists point out that memory loss is a result of trauma (Cvetkovich 98; Caruth 6). Given that Riel's mother is alcoholic and her father hit her, her brothers, and her mother, it is not surprising that she would suffer memory loss. Is this forgetting a queer forgetting, however? Does that make Riel herself queer or does it mean that trauma gives Riel a queer experience of time? Halberstam argues that "queer time operat[es] against the logics of succession, progress, development, and tradition proper to hetero-familial development" (75). I argue that Riel's attempts to organize her memories show that time is queered for her as Halberstam argues children are already queer, but instead of a mother disciplining Riel into straight time, Riel takes it upon herself to order temporality.

Riel's point of view as an omniscient third person narrator may represent a queering of the moment, as her response to memory loss suggests a stretching for heteronormative time, while realizing that linear time is a construct. Riel decides to make a memory chart "so that she would not lose things that happened" (59). But, realizing quickly that "it would probably be impossible to go through her memories in order of occurrence,"

Riel uses a loose leaf notebook so she can write down her memories as they occur and then arrange them in a time line so she can "piece things together" (59). In this passage, linear time is revealed as a construct. As Riel notes that she will not remember her memories linearly, we see that models of linear time conflict with the tendency of her brain to organize and access memories non-linearly. At the end of *Shadow Tag*, Riel tells us that the entire text is essentially another memory chart that she has created from her original memory chart, her mother's diaries, and talking to her lesbian Aunt May. But in representing the memories, Riel takes on a queer role as third person omniscient narrator. Through taking on this third space, Riel disidentifies with straight time. She becomes the constructor of straight time, rather than being constructed by it. Muñoz notes that, "disidentification can be understood as a way of shuffling back and forth between reception and production" (Disidentifications 25). Thus Riel "receives" straight time in that she re-orders the narrative linearly, but she also alerts the reader that straight time is a production, and thereby reveals how she constructs it in a cyclical fashion. In fact, one might argue that third person omniscience is in and of itself a queer point of view as it disrupts linear time, even when stories are laid out in a linear time line. The third omniscient (as opposed to the close third), through his/her/their ability to zoom in and out of the narrative, slide through and rearrange time, also represents a queer futurity, as it is a reconstructed temporality based on affect. In other words, third omniscient narration functions in *Shadow Tag* as the space Sedgwick refers to as *beside* which she argues, "permits a spacious agnosticism about several of the linear logics that enforce dualistic thinking" (8). Thus this "third" narrative space intertwines affect and temporality, as Riel demonstrates so well with her memory chart. Anxiety prompts Riel to create the chart, as

she realizes her memories do not fit into linear time, but are ordered affectively, Riel reorders time to be linear rather than affective (59). From the third omniscient space, Riel as narrator orders time and affect beside one another in the sense that Sedgwick argues: temporality and affect are neither opposed to one another nor intertwined, but occur together.

Thus Riel's point of view represents the tension between heterosexual, linear time constructs, queer memory, and race. It is in creating the memory chart that Riel "became aware of herself as an Indian, an American Indian, a Native person...Her skin was pale, her eyes a muddy hazel, but she was still an Indian, wasn't she?" (59). Prior to making the memory chart, Riel is stuck in the immediate present. All she can remember clearly is her older brother, Florian, and the family dogs (58). Yet, by organizing time in a linear, colonial way, Riel remembers performances and experiences of Indian-ness - powwows, ceremonies, prayers (59). In her present moment, though, Riel's only access to her Native heritage (until May enters the text) is through what she has been taught in school and her mother's books. Ultimately, May (and her partner Bobbi) will queer Nativeness for Riel in a way that she finds preferable. Prior to the memory chart, Riel experiences herself as white, while after making the memory chart she strives through study to become "not just a Native person, an American Indian, an Ojibwa or a Dakota or a Cree, but a person of example. She would become a girl of depth, strength, cunning, and truth" (62). But Riel gets stuck in binaries as she studies how to be an Indian. While Irene, her mother, thinks Riel is writing stories, Riel is working on her memory chart and explains to her mother "I only write real stories...I stick to exactly the way things happen. If I imagine a weird thing, I write it under Unreal Thoughts" (102).

It is crucial to remember that all of Riel's record (and thus the entire text of the narrative) is made possible by May. As Riel's adoptive mother, May is the space of containment. May's home is the place from which Riel ventures into the world of the third person, into the realm of recording memories and getting stuck in them. May is a temporal guide, but also a racial one. She gets Irene to bring Riel and her brothers to powwows and May's partner is the one who makes Riel a powwow costume. After living with May and Bobbi, Riel says "I also found that the old-time Indians are us, still going to sundances, ceremonies, talking in the old language and even using the old skills if we feel like it, not making a big deal" (249). Riel suggests an integration of race and temporality. She has become the "old-time Indian" she strived to be and become comfortable with a different temporality. Instead of Indian being an impossible destination, as it was when Riel studied to become more than one Native ethnicity but a combination of them all, Riel can use the old language and skills in the present.

Interestingly, Riel's older brother, Florian does not recover by going into a dialogic experience of time the way Riel does. While Riel documents time to seek order, and ultimately negotiates temporal constructions, Florian is described as "a good boy...just lost in other thoughts" (107). After their parents die, Florian develops an addiction problem and is not saved by May, even though she pays for his first treatment (248). Florian is thus a foil to Riel. As children, while Riel seeks order, Florian gets lost in his genius mind studying math, physics, and drugs. As an adult, Florian attends college but discovers "he'd fried too many neurons and his classes were actually difficult" (248). Thus Florian returns to chrono-normativity, his brain somewhat broken. While Riel gets stuck in time, thanks to May's home, instead of being forced onto a linear timeline, she becomes omniscient and

reconstructs time around this traumatic moment. In other words, the entire novel becomes a one moment and many for Riel as through her omniscience, all events appear to her as a set of side by side connected moments. Thus Riel demonstrates Sedgwick's *beside* in that she portrays a linear narrative from a relational non-linear point of view.⁵⁸ Riel achieves a temporal dialogic, while her brothers vanish: Florian is no longer himself and her younger brother Stoney drops out of college, lives on Molokai, and "doesn't often talk to me or Florian" (248). Is this a suggestion that May, the Magical Lesbian, can only save women?

May as Wish Granter and Temporal Guide

May is invited into the narrative by Gil's "heart's desire project" (64). After slapping Riel and feeling embarrassed, Gil decides to make up for that incident as well as the countless others by fulfilling his children's and wife's deepest dreams. The youngest, Stoney, asks for a cloud and Gil hires May to paint clouds on his ceiling. Thus May's entrance into the text comes as a wish granter. May's blood tie to Irene – a shared father – excites her. Irene writes about May "I have suddenly got someone else. A sister. Someone who could perhaps be just for me, the way my mother was just for me" (72). Here Irene connects May to her mother's action - being just for her. So we return here to the Magical Lesbian as a substitute mother, acting in place of a protagonist's mother, similar to Shug's and Aunt Raylene's caretaking.

⁵⁸ As I mentioned earlier, Sedgwick's *beside* offers a means to explore textual representations of binaries and non-binary constructs simultaneously (8).

Riel's desire to know herself as an Indian is fulfilled by her aunt May and May's partner Bobbi.⁵⁹ They begin by taking Riel to powwows, and Bobbi sews her a costume. Sewing is something we see in *The Color Purple* as well as *Bastard Out of Carolina*, which may be a means for women to construct vernacular safe spaces away from trauma that are creatively non-linguistic and non-linear. Thus sewing can be a means to heal from trauma in a queered domestic space.⁶⁰ In *The Color Purple*, Shug encourages Celie to sew instead of murder Albert, while in *Bastard*, when Bone is catatonic, Raylene sits on the porch sewing curtains (147; 304). In the case of *Shadow Tag*, sewing is connected to the narrator's desire to know herself and her ethnicity - with a powwow costume, Riel gains a physical object to connect her to her Native heritage when previously all she had was her mother's books. Riel was studying to be an Indian - but when she meets May and Bobbi, Riel gains the opportunity to embody Indian-ness in the form of a traditional outfit. May also reconnects Irene to her native heritage. When May tells Irene she is her half sister, Irene is overcome with emotion because as she tells May she is:

An Indian with no relatives. Sad. I do have lots of cousins but I don't get together with them. My mom broke away. Things were bad for her back home. So there are pieces of family, half brothers and half sisters. I don't know them. I can't absorb this. You're my half sister (71).

May responds by telling Irene, "I'll be your whole sister. It's the Indian way. It's only blood" (71). Irene ends up thrilled to have a sister while May continues to challenge heteronormative, Anglo ideas of family. She declares herself Irene's full sister as part of

⁵⁹ Note how this parallels Bone's desire to know herself as part of the Boatwright family and Celie's desire to reconnect with her sister. Both Bone and Celie have these desires fulfilled by Magical Lesbians.

⁶⁰ Sewing and trauma are also correlated in Caribbean women's literature such as in Lorna Goodison's *From Harvey River* (2007) and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998).

their shared racial heritage while at the same time discounting the importance of blood and biological ties. Thus May points to the boundary between sister and half-sister as constructed and arbitrary. Like motherhood, sisterhood is also dialogic. This dialogic kinship entails extending various types of familial relationships to unrelated kith. This is a practice well documented and studied in queer communities and is also a non-Western strategy of creating community, as anthropologists and sociologists have noted.⁶¹ Dialogic kinship can disrupt reproductive futurity as social networks replace blood ties, both in the present and over time, and across generations. Not insignificantly, this type of dialogic kinship is common in Erdrich's writing.

Where does May herself fit in relation to queer temporality? She can guide other characters away from chrono-normativity, and she suggests that linear timelines are lies because time itself is a construct. May does not have to construct time because she can move through it. Theories of lesbian protagonists, however, suggest that lesbian

⁶¹ Other examples of dialogic kinship can be found in anthropology, sociology, and popular culture. For example, anthropologist Barre Tolkien notes that "urban Blacks in America have developed...an extended street family of brothers and sisters bound together by oral tradition and custom" (359) and anthropologist Igor Kopytoff notes that in certain African societies bands on the frontier "would need at one time to acquire more members and at another time shed members it already had; hence, inflexible kinship based rules of membership (for example permanent membership by birth) was not congruent with the band's existence" (42). Anthropologist Kath Weston writes, "familial ties between persons of the same sex that may be erotic but are not grounded in biology or procreation do not fit any tidy division of kinship into relations of blood or marriage" (3). Sociologists have documented queer kinship systems relative specifically to lesbian mothering such as Beilby Dalton's argument that "lesbian mothers effect change in the institutional definitions of the family" (38). In "Gender is Burning," Judith Butler as well examines the queer kinship filmmaker Jennie Livingston's documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990). Recently, filmmaker Ilene Chaiken's documentary on lesbians in southern Mississippi portrays Black "gay families" which form alternative kinship systems based on sexual orientation and friendship rather than biological ties.

protagonists only slip through time in one direction: the future. For example Judith Roof points out that:

lesbian fictional histories...exist in a paradoxical relation to any notion of history; with origin denied or useless, the lesbian novel traces a history with no beginning, its writing urged on by a desire for a total picture...on the one hand the novels trace history...on the other hand, they declare that history finally cannot explain either character or sexuality (Sexuality 168).

Thus for lesbian protagonists, they are always already centered on futurity - even without children. But secondary lesbian characters have strong connections with the past and part of their carework in these texts is to connect other characters to their own past. For example, when May asks Irene out to coffee, "May asked if Irene remembered when it [the coffee shop] had been a hardware store" (66). May and Irene then trade memories of the objects the hardware store sold. May suggests going back to the hardware store to have coffee "for old time's sake" (67). Later on, when May is painting a mural in a hotel she asks Irene to lunch there. It is at this lunch that Irene remembers her one night affair with another man. Prior to this moment, Irene thinks the night she spent with another man as:

History is two things, after all. To have meaning, history must consist of both occurrence and narrative. If she never told, if he never told, if the two of them never talked about it, there was no narrative. So the act, though it had occurred, was meaningless. It did not count as infidelity. It did not count at all (105).

By refusing to acknowledge the narrative, Irene attempts to re-order and queer time. But May facilitates returning Irene to the history of that night, as she invites Irene to lunch at the very hotel where Irene had her affair. While going to lunch with May, Irene remembers the details and thus the history of that night. The feel of the sheets, the hotel room, even the way the napkins were folded on the table in the dining room (133).

Above, I discussed Judith Roof's work on how "the lesbian narrative severs the connection between present and past -- the origin -- as a useful explanation for the present"

(168 Mothering). What *Shadow Tag* shows is that when lesbians are moved out of the centers of narratives, their relationship to history shifts. Shug, Aunt Raylene, and May are all links to the past, functioning as living story archives that let protagonists use the past to understand the present. They each bring protagonists backwards in time but with differing results. As I explored in Chapter 2, Shug opens up Celie's past abuse in order to help her heal from it. Aunt Raylene, on the other hand, uses the past to protect Bone from her mother's criticism. May's link to the past proves to be both a relief and a problem for Irene. It is a relief in that it gives Irene family outside of Gil and reconnects her to herself as Ojibwa, but connecting to the past is destructive as Irene's present depends upon ignoring Gil's repeated abuse. Riel, who throughout the text has been longing to embody her Ojibwa heritage, has her wish to know herself as Indian granted by her Aunt May.

From Dialectic to Dialogic Mothers

In this section, I focus on how May demonstrates the permeability of the concept of mother. Like the other Magical Lesbians in this study, May acts as substitute and adoptive mother (both to Irene and Riel), but May is complicated by her ongoing relationship with her biological son. Having both a biological son and adopted children places May on both sides of the constructed, heterosexual mothering. "Mother" as it is constructed in heterosexuality is a binary: one either is or is not a mother (and note that mothering is tied up with ideas of the state - to be a mother one must birth or adopt a child and be granted motherhood from state and legal documents). Through May, we see that the binary which separates mother from "not-mother" is permeable and ambiguous, and since May cannot inhabit both parts of a binary, she offers us another option: dialogic mothering. This

relational, fluid, situational based model of mothering challenges both heteronormative and lesbian representations of mothering. For example, Judith Roof describes a trope of absent mothers in lesbian fiction:

the paradox of the lesbian story begins with a representation of the lesbian protagonist as an orphan, as illegitimate, as of mixed parentage, as lacking an original relationship with a biological mother, and as having no link to a patriarchally-blessed beginning (168).

In *Shadow Tag*, (and *Bastard Out of Carolina*), this pattern is reversed and secondary lesbian characters are not orphaned; instead they take in orphaned children. Not only do Magical Lesbians reveal the discipline that maintains heteronormative binary constructs such as mother/father, but they also disidentify with lesbian tropes. This disidentification functions as Muñoz notes to "work on, with, and against a cultural form," as Magical Lesbians allude to, enact, and simultaneously challenge lesbian tropes (Disidentification 12). Lesbian mothers disidentify with the orphaned lesbian trope as they may come from Roof "illegitimate, mixed parentage" as May does, but both Raylene and May have living biological mothers they are in contact with.⁶² Furthermore, Roof points out that it is heteronormativity which necessitates the lesbian orphan to begin with, and, extending that argument, I contend that lesbian mothers who are not orphans and maintain contact with their own mothers in fiction disrupt the terms of the heteronormative price of admission – being orphaned - for lesbians into fiction (168).

As I focus on lesbians as biological and adoptive mothers in this chapter, it is important to define what I mean by mother. According to the OED a mother is, "the female parent of a human being; a woman in relation to a child or children to whom she has given birth...a

⁶² When May tells Irene they share the same biological father, she says, "He never claimed me, said May, and my mom got married while she was pregnant with me. So it turned out okay. I got a nice stepdad" (70).

woman who undertakes the responsibilities of a parent towards a child" (Mother, n. 1) while mothering is "to be or become the mother of, give birth to; (chiefly fig.) to be the source or originator of, give rise to, produce" (Mother, v. 1). Note that the verb mother, unlike the noun, does not specify a female actor. Interestingly, older and more obscure definitions of the term mother contain a connotation of a mother as abject. For example, mother as a noun can refer to "dregs, sediment, mould; *esp* the lees or sediment of wine; the scum rising to the surface of fermenting liquors," while as a verb mother can be "to become full of sediment or dregs; to become mouldy...to thicken; to become sticky, adhere" (Mother, n.2; Mother, v.2). Finally, mothered as an adjective can mean, "that has become full of sediment or dregs" (Mothered, adj. 2).⁶³ While these definitions are rare, obscure, and certainly not what I mean by mother, I find them interesting because they suggest the abject: parts of food or wine that one does not consume and that must be disposed. Kristeva writes that labor and sacrifice link mothering to the abject, arguing that the "maternal image is tied to suffering, illness, sacrifice...this kind of motherhood, the masochistic mother who never stops working is repulsive and fascinating, abject" (158). Kristeva's argument that feminized labor can turn mothers abject has intriguing implications for how we understand feminized carework. If, as Kristeva argues, "it is not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order," then her masochistic mother, (who is such because of her attachment to feminized labor), disrupts the very system which created her in the first place. If the gendered

⁶³ For instance, these two examples from the OED demonstrate how mothering is an undesirable outcome: "1718 J. QUINCY *Pharmacopœia Officinalis* 228 It's an insipid Phlegm..and will not keep long without mothering and stinking. / 1728 E. SMITH *Compl. Housewife* (1750) 109 If your pickle mothers, boil it again" and "1888 R. LEADER in S. O. *Addy Gloss. Words Sheffield* 152 Flour mothers when it adheres together in lumps" (Mother, v.2).

division of labor places responsibility for the home onto women, then the abject, overworking mother suggests an over-conformity to these roles to the extent that she challenges their very boundaries.

However, prior to Kristeva, psychoanalysis distrusted female sexuality and either ignored or demonized it. Coinciding with demonized female sexuality is a distrust of the mother. For example, Freud argues that Medusa's head is a symbol of female genitals, and that when Athena wears a portrait of Medusa on her dress "she displays the terrifying genitals of the Mother" (272 in Young-Bruehl). Furthermore, the mother is the origin of Freud's uncanny, as Freud links fears of the uncanny to the womb and "mother's genitals" (244-5). Karen Horney equates masculine fear of women's genitals to fears of the mother (Dread 352). Otero argues that cultural fears of women's genitals "reinforce the rationale behind the marginalization of women" (284). Thus a distrust of women's sexuality, which includes reproduction, rationalizes heterosexist, patriarchal family structures. Magical Lesbians disrupt this domestication dialectically, dialogically, and temporally.

Beginning with this dialectic disruption, the well-used definition of mother defines mother in relation to either child, or object (such a manuscript or ship), thus constantly evoking a set of dialectic relationships: mother/father; mother/child (Mother, n. 1). This definition of mother depends upon opposition to create meaning, is paradigmatic, and set in a particular range of outcomes. Lesbian mothers have the potential to destabilize this dialectic and direct us to view mother as a dialogic.⁶⁴ Instead of using dichotomies such as mother/not mother to distinguish who is and is not a mother, the dialogic mother shifts and is situationally dependent. While the idea of "lesbian mother" draws attention to the

⁶⁴ By dialogic I refer to Bakhtin's dialogism which is a means of knowing language to be fluid rather than constant.

heteronormativity of the noun “mother,” this conception alone is not enough to demonstrate dialogic mothering. Yet, the very existence of the term lesbian mother suggests that “mother” alone is heterosexual.⁶⁵ Indeed, this is not just the case in popular culture but occurs within feminist theory as well. For example, Judith Roof explores the connection of “mother” to heterosexuality made by feminist psychoanalytic theorists Nancy Chodorow and Julia Kristeva arguing that Chodorow’s classic *The Reproduction of Mothering* “assumes that mothering—conceiving a child—is the act of a heterosexual woman (or the heterosexual act of a woman)” (160). Roof points out that Chodorow turns mothering into a dialectic arguing, “for Chodorow, the term mother refers to father, even if father is absent and mother has no relation to him” (Not for You 162). While Roof explores the absence of mothers in novels with lesbian protagonists, I argue that her impetus to view, “mothering as an activity makes it a function rather than a fate of gender...then mothers can be (and are) lesbian, adoptive, unmarried, celibate, sterile, grandmothers, aunts, hired nannies, or males” (162) shifts mothering from a dialectic to a dialogic, more so than the term lesbian mother. In other words, viewing mothering as based in behavior rather than a binaristic heteronormative identity means that concept of mother has slippery, blurred boundaries that vary from situation to situation. Instead of using contradictions to create meaning, (mother/not mother) which is how the dialectic functions, the dialogic mother is fluid and context driven. The dialogic mother emerges, as Magical Lesbians do, when a situation calls for a mother, such as the death of the parents in

⁶⁵ While gay male culture has staked a claim on the term mother, using it to refer to “an effeminate homosexual man;...one who acts as a mentor to a younger man,” and made it into the Oxford English Dictionary, the mothering performed by lesbian women must still be demarked by the word lesbian (Mother, n.1).

Shadow Tag, or Bone's abuse in *Bastard Out of Carolina*.⁶⁶ Viewing mother as a dialogic reveals the constructedness of the heteronormative, patriarchal binary created when mother is inherently connected to father.

Looking at mothering as a dialogic action also highlights the carework mothering entails. Yet, echoes of patriarchal discourse, which shapes mothering as a dialectic, are found in feminist theorizing about the mothers and carework. For many feminist theorists, childrearing is problematic because women are expected to do most of it. Nancy Chodorow argues that assumptions about women's roles in nuclear families "is natural and proper...that women's child *care* is indistinguishable from their child*bearing*, that women are for biological reasons better parents than men...have continued to serve as grounds for arguments against most changes in the social organization of gender" (219). Note here that Chodorow draws attention to the connection between carework and biological motherhood. This is one of the ways which adoptive Magical Lesbians disrupt the organization of the nuclear family as they emerge in texts when biological mothers cannot to protect children from abusive men and when there is too much carework for a biological mother to do. For example, when Irene brings Gil the divorce papers, she leaves her children with May, and it is May who Irene tells when Gil rapes her instead of signing the divorce papers (219; 225). In this scene May comes into the text since Irene cannot protect the children and deal with an enraged Gil at the same time.

⁶⁶ Two other examples of this are Alli Gilchrist, a Magical Lesbian character in Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* and *Parable of the Talents*. In Butler's imagined future California which is violent and chaotic, Alli adopts a boy whose parents were brutally murdered and Blu Rain, a teacher in Sapphire's *Push* who takes in the brutally abused protagonist, Precious.

Much of the feminist work on gender inequality and carework calls for men to share equally in childcare. bell hooks writes that "as more heterosexual and lesbian women choose to bear children with no first ties to male parents, there will exist a greater need for community-based childcare that would bring children into contact with male childrearsers so they will not grow into maturity thinking women are the only group who do or should do childrearing" (142). hooks, Chodorow, and feminist carework expert Arlie Russell Hochschild argue that the solution to overworked mothers is to have men do more carework. While it is certainly important that men do their fair share of caring, I am wary of this as a solution as it implies that mothering is defined by and connected to fathering, which supports the normative inevitability of the very construct – the nuclear family – which establishes women as primary caregivers. However, hooks, and to some extent Hochschild, suggest shifting childcare to communities rather than nuclear families, a solution which moves away from viewing mothering as a part of this unspoken, yet openly reinforced and accepted binary relationship.

Contemporary theorizing on lesbian mothering evokes this problematic mother / father dialectic as theorists argue that the figure of the lesbian mother, same-sex marriage activism, and two parent same-sex families have engulfed lesbianism into heterosexuality. Bonnie Mann argues that unless there is a transformation "in the myth of motherhood" then lesbianism becomes absorbed into heterosexuality. Mann goes so far as to wonder:

are there lesbian mothers, really? Or does the figure of the lesbian mother become a vehicle for a sophisticated heterosexism that operates to erase or diffuse lesbian difference at the same time remake it? Might this figure work, paradoxically, in spite of right wing fears to redeploy the myth of natural, happy, heterosexual motherhood--..." (154).

Mann however, concludes her relatively cynical perspective by arguing for a “return to the feminist critique of motherhood as an institutional site of woman’s subordination, to a political struggle over the material conditions in which women, and some men, mother children” (163). Thus, similar to Roof, Mann is arguing for the institution of mothering itself to be shifted so it becomes a series of actions and behaviors rather than a predetermined, gender based identity. Similarly, Suzanna Walters argues that, “Whether it is marriage or parenting, both well-meaning heterosexuals and mainstream gays seem to stress gay sameness to straights. Our relationships, our desires, our parenting styles are again and again presented as replicas of heterosexual patterns” (49). Mann’s “myth of motherhood” is emerges in lesbian women’s discussion of pregnancy, as they note how pregnancy performs femininity in a way that provides straight privilege. For example, Adrienne Rich refers to 1940s feminine dress norms as “difficult-to-manage disguises” but notes that once she “was visibly and clearly pregnant” she was surrounded by “an atmosphere of approval” (25-6). Writing twenty-five years later, in 2001, lesbian writer Louise A. Blum expresses a similar sentiment during her pregnancy saying, “suddenly I felt like the most beautiful woman in the world” (152). While both Rich and Blum express the privilege that comes from appearing heteronormative and feminine, theorist Bonnie Mann views this as a trap noting that “heteronormativity manages to occupy and redeploy itself through this figure [of the lesbian mother]” (Mann 154).

How do we explain secondary lesbian characters in literature who mother children? Are they reinforcing the mothering dialectic or do they destabilize mothering by presenting it as a dialogic? I argue that both of these occur simultaneously. Readers' and critics' tendency to overlook secondary characters' lesbianism suggests that Magical Lesbians fold

seamlessly into heteronormativity. Yet, upon closer inspection, characters such as May and Aunt Raylene from *Bastard Out of Carolina* do not fit so neatly into binary constructs of motherhood. In fact, they even destabilize lesbian tropes. Analyzing lesbian classic such as Rita Mae Brown's *Oranges are Not the Only Fruit* (1997), Judith Roof points out that a common trope in lesbian fiction is an orphaned, illegitimate, and/or mixed race protagonist who has no contact with her biological parents (168). While Roof points out that *The Color Purple* adheres to this trope, and it does – Celie's mother is absent, this pattern of orphaned lesbians shifts as secondary lesbian characters themselves take on motherhood. May and Aunt Raylene do not have absent mothers. And what are we to make of the recurrent pairing of abusive or absent men with reparative lesbian caretaking in texts such as *Bastard Out of Carolina* and *Shadow Tag*?⁶⁷

Take for example this exchange between May and Irene:

Do you have kids? Irene asked.
 I had my son when I was sixteen. Before I knew I was a happy, well adjusted lesbian.
 So he made it just under the wire.
 May laughed. And he's lucky because my mom raised him, too. Do you powwow
 dance or anything? Do your kids? (68).

Here May references having her son when she was straight and Irene's response implies Chodorow's dialectic mother: the implication is that there must be a father (and thus intercourse) rather than a sperm donor. Reproductive technology is often conspicuously absent from contemporary narratives with lesbian mothers.⁶⁸ Furthermore,

⁶⁷ See also Achy Obejas' *Memory Mambo*, and Wally Lamb's *We are Water*.

⁶⁸ See for example Wally Lamb's *We Are Water*, where the lesbian protagonist (not the Magical Lesbian) has children before entering a same-sex relationship. While Jodi Picoult's (2011) *Sing You Home* may seem to support lesbian use of reproductive technology, this is negated as the lesbian couple uses implanted zygotes which were first created within a

Irene's comments reproduce Judith Roof's comments on Chodorow's version of mothering, which "assumes a dominant heterosexual notion of maternity that necessarily takes place within clearly patriarchal organizations" (162). May's response to Irene's heteronormative comment, however, both disidentifies with dialectic mothering and breaks Roof's lesbian trope of absent mothers. By disidentify here I mean to "work on, with, and against a cultural form," (Muñoz, Disidentification 12). When May tells Irene her son is lucky because his grandmother helped raise him, she is challenging Chodorow's ever-present father as she invokes a dual woman child-rearing scenario even before she becomes a lesbian. Her son is *lucky* to have been raised by her and her grandmother, rather than unlucky to have been raised without a father. Thus, even though Irene suggests mother as a heterosexual identity, May challenges this by bringing in her grandmother as a co-parent. The tension of lesbianism versus heterosexuality comes up again between May and Irene when they are having coffee:

In the uncomfortable silence Irene blurted out that she had once had a girlfriend. Oh, said May. Once upon a time. You're a has-be-an. May stared and frowned in a way that made Irene start talking. There was way too much, Irene said, identification, too much psychic connection and all that. It felt invasive. So you found a guy who'd keep his distance by painting you naked (69).

heterosexual marriage. One mainstream film featuring a lesbian couple who has used reproductive technology, "The Kids are Alright" (2010) has a plot which centers on the children seeking out their sperm donor father and one of the lesbians having intercourse with him, simultaneously reinforcing and mocking heteronormative models of lesbian mothering. Another example from popular culture is the Showtime television series *Queer as Folk* (2000 - 2005), where Mel and Lindsay are a lesbian, married couple that inseminate themselves with gay male friends' sperm, and have the babies biologically. The show, in this regard, illustrates the conscious construction of an alternative, inclusive kinship structure discussed earlier in this chapter.

Irene presents lesbianism as problematic because it creates too much connection, but May counters this by pointing out that Gil invades Irene's privacy through objectification rather than identification. There is also a suggestion in Irene's view of lesbian relationships of a fluid sexuality. It is not missing sexual attraction that propels Irene away from lesbian relationships – it was too much intimacy. Gil's career has been built on his exploitative paintings of Irene. Thus Gil uses Irene's sexual and racial difference for his career and to support their family. As Mann argues, "the price of entrance into the cultural institution of lesbian motherhood is the sacrifice of lesbian difference," it is interesting that Irene and May are debating lesbian identification. Erdrich is suggesting that lesbian difference from heterosexuality (for women) emerges from lesbian identification. After this conversation, "Irene said nothing, waiting for May to apologize, but May didn't seem the least bit sorry" (69). May's blunt speech leaves room for Irene to reveal even more about her relationship with Gil and the ways he has sexualized her in his paintings, telling May "I let Gil paint me with the American flag stuck up my ass" (69). Irene's reveal to May suggests slightly that May is invasive in her bluntness, but then we see Gil physically invading Irene's body with an object for a painting. While Irene claims identification is invasive, this conversation with May prompts her to talk about a physical invasion.

While Irene may view sexually as fluid, she engages in a dialectics of other/self when she talks about lesbianism as invasive. Here, Irene suggests lesbianism is invasive because it violates the dialectic of other/self, but May twists this by focusing on Gil's actions. In other words, May moves towards a concept of a dialogic of other/self, where what is invasive depends not on sexual object choice, but on behavior and context. However, May's dialogic has limits: when May acts as a dialogic mother to Riel, her

biological child gets left behind (135). Similar to Shug's children who are briefly mentioned but rarely appear in *The Color Purple*, May's son becomes absorbed into Riel's story. He is only mentioned twice as an individual in the text, both times to Irene. When Irene brings him up to May, saying, "How's your son? We never talked about him," it is to distract herself from her own urge to tell May she wants to leave Gil (134-5). And, interestingly, May replies with this:

He's doing fine. His dad's got him this week. Do you know Ray DeChardin? Teaches engineering at the U? He's married, two little ones. My boy likes going over there; he has his own room. The wife's, you know, okay. She's Navajo, or Dine, really quiet and small and pretty (135).

Opposed to May's original mention of how her son was raised by her and her mother, this quote places her son within a heterosexual family (with a very feminine mother), which May suggests her son likes because of the extra material benefit of having his own room. I think this reveals a tension in the text between the possibilities of dialogic mothering and dialectic mothering's ideological stronghold. May's son liking his own room connects dialectic mothering – mothering by identity – to institutional rewards. However, this tension drops from the text as May's biological son fades into the background, only being referenced when he is in a group, such as when May invites Irene to a powwow at "the kids' school" (77). The other children in this group belong to May's partner, Bobbi. At the powwow, Bobbi's son is singled out for his dancing, but May's son is not mentioned (128). Even when May and Bobbi come on Christmas Eve, they bring their greyhound, but not their children. Finally, at the end of the novel, Riel says "we grew up with May and Bobbi's family—we had a traditional adoption and I got brothers, sisters, twenty cousins" (248). This omission is significant, as May's biological son marks her as having once been straight, furthermore, the narrative disconnect between May and her biological son provides the

space for May to be a dialogic mother to Riel and her brothers.⁶⁹ May's unnamed son fades into the very background of the narrative, as perhaps it would be too destabilizing, too queer, to show May clearly with her biological son, her partner's children, and her adopted niece. By queer here I refer to the alternative kinship systems I mentioned earlier and to Sedgwick's concept of *beside*. Presenting May as raising both biological and adopted children with another woman queers biological kinship, showing that the boundaries between biological and queer kinship are not always diametrically opposed to one another nor are they completely merged. May's duties to her own family take away from her purpose in the text. Even though she shows us a dialogic possibility for mothering, the price of her admission into this story is her service to Irene, Riel, Riel's brothers, and even to Gil.⁷⁰

Queering the Moment

Like Aunt May, Erdrich herself intervenes on questions of queer temporality and straight time. For example, when Irene and Gil argue about whether or not his paintings of Irene are kitsch, Irene says:

⁶⁹ This is not to say that any biological child automatically means a woman is straight; however, May refers to the birth of her son as occurring before she "knew" she was a lesbian.

⁷⁰ Gil not only hires May to paint his youngest son's ceiling, but he also asks her to follow Irene to make sure Irene isn't cheating on him. May only agrees because she is worried Gil would get someone else to follow Irene if she did not - had Irene been cheating May planned to cover for her because Irene is her sister (167).

All I know is you're making kitsch out of me.
No, Irene, I'm painting death.
Irene raised her eyebrows and stopped talking.
But later, when they came back to finish the salad and take lasagna from the oven:
Ha, Gil, death is kitsch too (95).

In this scene, as well as Irene's unfinished dissertation about the painter George Caitlin, the "white" practice of documenting Native Americans freezes them into straight time. Irene notes that the Indians Caitlin painted often died after sitting for him (45). This idea, that vitality is scarified for the static image, runs throughout *Shadow Tag* and is found in feminist theory. Donna Haraway argues, "to make an exact image is to insure against disappearance, to cannibalize life until it is safely and permanently a specular image, a ghost" (45). While Haraway connects the gorilla safaris, museums, and scientific epistemology of the early 20th century to patriarchy, both Erdrich and Lauren Berlant suggest that the discourse of reproductive heterosexuality 'cannibalizes life.' Berlant argues that reproductive heterosexuality is a "dead identity" which is "dead, frozen, fixed or at rest" (382-3). In other words, for Berlant, the state narrows and dominates reproductive heterosexuality, forcing queers to look outside of reproductive heterosexuality, to queer futurity, for fluid identities. While Berlant studies the interaction of pornographic images and discourses of a "little girl" who must be protected, Haraway connects the very desire for the image to reproductive futurity, arguing "taxidermy fulfills the fatal desire to represent, to be whole; it is a politics of reproduction" (30). Though Haraway focuses on the reproduction of images of nature, and Berlant focuses on the discourse of human reproduction, the link between image, reproductive discourse, and control is important.⁷¹ In the above quote from *Shadow Tag*, Gil's claim that he is painting death suggests that he

⁷¹ See Katherine Henninger *Ordering the Facade: Photography and Contemporary Southern Women's Writing*, pp 8 - 9.

controls Irene through capturing her image. This is echoed throughout *Shadow Tag* with Irene's study of the Indian subjects who die after Caitlin paints them, and with Riel's research on the Mandan as she seeks to recover "her old-time Indian abilities" (62). As I mentioned in a previous section, it is not books but the Magical Lesbian who facilitates Riel's integration of her Indian identity, both historically and in the present. In *Shadow Tag*, May intervenes on Berlant's dead identity as she acts as a temporal guide for both Riel and Irene, revealing a queer futurity embedded in reproductive heterosexuality.

The connection between a captured image and death reemerges in a central argument between Irene and Gil turns about temporality.⁷² They fight over what constitutes a moment, and whether paintings capture one moment or many (48). Gil thinks moments are momentous (in other words, singular occurrences that change everything) as exemplified by the surprise party he throws to win back Irene's love, "The moment would come. The bulb would light up over Irene's head. I really love Gil! His belief in these life-changing moments of self-realization was another thing they argued about" (97). Gil's moment is Western, normative, and pushes against queer temporality. Arjun Appadurai argues that the "Eurochronological" perception of time is:

⁷² The concept of images stealing souls (a non-Western concept) is referenced often in Irene's thoughts about Gil's paintings. For example, Irene thinks at one point while sitting for Gil, "can a person be harmed by the depiction, even appropriation, of something intangible as one's image?" (31). This is further reinforced by Irene's research on George Caitlin's paintings, as Irene relates the story of a Mandan girl who died after Caitlin painted her because, "Caitlin had put so much of her into it that when he took his painting away from the village, it drew a part of her life with it. She had begun bleeding from the mouth...throwing up blood. Her family told Caitlin that by taking the portrait with him he was drawing the strings out of her heart and they would soon break" (45).

One of the most problematic legacies of grand Western social science (Auguste Comte, Karl Marx, Ferdinand Tönnies, Max Weber, Émile Durkheim) is that it has steadily reinforced the sense of some single moment--call it the modern moment--that by its appearance creates a dramatic and unprecedented break between past and present (3).

For Appadurai, this idea of a compact moment which signifies a clear difference between the present and the past is problematic because it ignores other experiences of time, and universalizes "Western" notions of time, making it the standard for understanding history and temporality. Gil illustrates this on an individual level. His refusal to acknowledge any other experience of time prevents him from knowing Irene. He is easily manipulated when Irene writes in her journal "I stopped loving Gil abruptly before Stoney was born" (29). If he recalled his arguments with Irene over the significance of moments, he might have realized she would never experience falling out of love as a singular event. Instead of Appadurai's, "modern moment," Irene believes that, "There are always many moments, there is never just one. There are many points of clarity and many causes to one effect" (48). But, despite this belief, Irene fails at her attempts to be temporally ambiguous, as she cannot achieve this layered temporality. I use "fail" here in the sense that Halberstam uses it, as he argues that failure is, "a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline as a form of critique...failure recognizes that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant" (Failure 88).

We see this not only in Irene's explanation of why she could not be a lesbian, (which I discussed in an earlier section), but also in Irene's two journals. The epistolary sections of *Shadow Tag* are formed by two journals Irene keeps. "The Red Journal" is one she realized her husband has been reading, so she keeps another journal for herself, "The Blue Journal." In the Blue Journal, we see how Irene struggles to escape chrono-normativity but cannot.

When she contemplates leaving her marriage she explains to herself it is impossible because, “I have been taught to think that life proceeds inevitably from its formative starting point and that its course is difficult to change” (18). When Irene does try to change her life course and leave Gil, he will not let her go and he threatens to take away the children if she tries to leave him. Irene decides to convince Gil in the Red Journal that none of the children are biologically his, hoping then he will leave her. Irene then recreates a past in the Red Journal that she both thinks is preposterous and almost begins to believe herself. She rewrites her own history to sever Gil's biological ties to the children. Gil figures it out eventually, but Irene disrupts chrono-normativity by relying on fictionalized biological ties. In other words, while her rewritten history disrupts the normative time line she also reinforces the importance of blood relationships by implying that the children each have different fathers. Realizing that Gil is moored to normative time, it would seem that Irene decides that the only way away from Gil is through is to substitute an alternative linear time line.

Yet with the journal, Irene queers time and fails queerly in relation to her marriage in a way that May does not. For May, Irene's marriage requires an escape through the state, not through an imagined past. After Gil realizes that Irene made up the three affairs in the Red Journal to get him to leave, Irene turns to May for advice saying, “I don't know how to get out,” and May replies, “you need a lawyer” (167).⁷³ May repeats this three times

⁷³ During this scene, May offers Irene physical comfort, putting her arms around Irene. This physical holding of an abused woman is seen in both *The Color Purple* and *Bastard*, and, similar to *Bastard*, May never touches her partner in the text. I argue that the use of touch only to comfort and not in an erotic way makes lesbian characters safe mothers. The reader knows they are lesbians but is never confronted with lesbian sexuality, and thus the Magical Lesbian mother evokes the de-sexualized spinster. Omitting lesbian affection from mainstream novels holds consistent with recent sociological research which noted that

throughout the scene, invoking state intervention. By the term “state,” I am referring to the apparatus through which governmental organizations have the authority to regulate individual lives (Alexander 64). Thus May urges Irene towards a state sanctioned solution - the court system – to get out of her marriage. When Irene brings Gil the divorce papers, she leaves the children with May. Gil rapes Irene when she tries to divorce him, and Irene decides to stay with him another day. Irene asks May to watch the kids another night, and May once again evokes the state as the solution saying, “Irene, call the police” (225). When Irene refuses to call the police, May replies, “Oh my god! I feel like beating the shit out of you myself!” (225). Here, Irene fails queerly, as she rejects the state as a means to escape Gil’s patriarchal authority, while May becomes chrono-normative, urging Irene towards one action – leaving – and suggesting Irene to appeal to a higher patriarchal authority: the state. In this case, it is straightness and compulsory heterosexuality that lead Irene to queer failure, even as she attempts the very queer solution of rewriting the past to change her future. But Erdrich’s text suggests that while Halberstam’s queer failure can be a way of thinking and of creating images, Irene’s “queering” of her marriage results in further entrapment in it, and finally, her death. May adopts the children, thus preventing the children from being swept into the state foster care system. I could read what transpires with Irene, her imagined past, and May’s attempts to call in the state as an argument that Magical Lesbians, because of the feminine caretaking expected of them as women, do not have the luxury of queer failure. Or, on the other hand, I could read this as suggesting that straight time can carry serious risk for heterosexual women, and that May’s queerness

heterosexual men and women had similar opinions about support for formal LGBT rights (such as marriage and partner benefits) heterosexual men and women had much less support for informal LGBT rights (such as hand-holding in public) (Doan et al, 1185).

allows her to know when to resist chrono-normativity and when to use it to her advantage. I am inclined towards the latter.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I've argued that an alternative way of reframing temporality is what makes secondary lesbian characters caring unique in that it facilitates rescuing women and children. Furthermore, shifting between straight time and queer time can carry great risk, as I have argued that Irene's queering of chrono-normativity further endangers her. May, however, because she stepped off the linear time-line when she became a "well adjusted lesbian," knows when to relax into queer temporality and when to conform to normative time. What's particularly interesting about *Shadow Tag* is that it contains so many reparative attempts: May cannot save Irene, or Irene's male children, the same way she saves Riel. Perhaps the point here is that people cannot be rescued completely, even by a Magical Lesbian, as long as they are bound by linear traps of gender, race, ethnicity, time, and sexuality. Irene dies attempting to rescue her husband as he commits suicide. While I find relief in arriving at an answer to my question *why are these characters lesbians?*, there remains much more to be explored about lesbian temporality as it relates to heteronormative constructs of motherhood. Judith Roof argues that heterosexuality reproduces motherhood, and if that is the case, what are lesbian mothers reproducing (Not for You 168)? Are lesbian mothers simply absorbed like into heteronormativity like Bonnie Mann argues? Through this research, I have noticed an undertow of queer fears of mothering. It would seem, from what I've read, that queer mothering does not fit into queer temporality – either it is too heteronormative, or too

domesticated. As I mentioned in the introduction, May (and other Magical Lesbians) demonstrate that viewing mothering as a set of behaviors as opposed to an identity shifts expectations of mothering from both queer and heterosexual perspectives. However, May's disconnect from her biological son tempers this representation of dialogic mothering, as her textual separation from him suggests a deep discomfort with queer reproduction.

I think authors avoid reproductive technology to manage this discomfort. After all, lesbian mothering by sperm donor is dialogic biology. Perhaps one could argue that Jodi Picoult's 2011 *Sing You Home* gives a mainstream portrait of lesbians using reproductive technology, but I think this is negated because the characters in this novel do not use sperm donors. Instead, the protagonist (who can no longer bear children) meets a Magical Lesbian with a suitable womb, and she carries a zygote which was frozen by the protagonist and her ex-husband. Though the state rules against the lesbian couple using the zygotes, the ex-husband in an act of patriarchal benevolence, gives the lesbian couple the zygote. In other words, both the state and the man whose sperm created the zygote carefully manage this reproductive technology. Interestingly, both film and television imagine and document lesbian use of reproductive technology. Mainstream films such as 2010's "The Kids are Alright" and television shows such as "Queer as Folk," and "The Real L Word" may give us sperm donors, but they do not give us dialogic mothers. As I lead into the concluding chapter of this project, I will be discussing implications for future research that explores the Magical Lesbian trope in the popular imagination, especially through mass mediated genres.

In the landmark *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz argues that "the present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception

of past and future affective worlds" (27 Muñoz, Cruising). What is the present state of queer motherhood? I have argued that *Shadow Tag* presents both the traditional dialectic, identity based mother and the fluid, situational shifting dialogic mother. The question of queer parenthood is particularly salient at this moment, as lesbian and gay adoption cases continue to increase in courts across the United States. While court cases may break down queer parenting to only a question of sexuality, the texts I've examined in this study show that race, ethnicity, class, and temporality intersect with representations of queer mothering. Queerness challenges assumptions of motherhood as an identity, and these novels suggest that heteronormative mothering cannot simply be widened to include queer couples. Magical Lesbian characters show that queer motherhood has seeped into mainstream discourses. Furthermore, both *Shadow Tag* and *Bastard Out of Carolina* suggest that reproductive futurity has already been queered, in that lesbian labor is represented as a crucial part of reproductive futurity for families who cannot or will not outsource their surplus carework to nannies and housekeepers. In this regard, I contend that queer motherhood must be studied as dialogic within the particular social complexities these texts evoke: families and kinship networks, broader constructs of race, class, the state, and temporality.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Magical Lesbian Interventions

This research centers on what Magical Lesbians reveal about temporality, queer memory, kinship, and disidentification as a destabilizing strategy. In particular, I complicate existing arguments about lesbians and memory in novels. Critic Judith Roof argues that in novels with lesbian protagonists, lesbians have no connection to the past (168). However, Magical Lesbians demonstrate that when lesbians are secondary characters, they become both archives and archivists. Where Magical Lesbians deeply challenge queer/lesbian theory, however, is with their connections to the past in these texts. Furthermore, they suggest that straight time can be risky for heterosexual women. Straight time in all three texts is presented as amnesiac of the past while queer time is where the past is remembered, which contradicts many theories of queer temporality. For Celie, Bone, Riel (and Riel's mother) straight time provides the place for trauma to occur and the legitimization of the patriarchal systems which support trauma. It is straight forgetting – as opposed to Halberstam's queer forgetting – that the protagonists in each of these texts uses to survive domestic abuse. And while Magical Lesbians disrupt straight time to rescue protagonists, they also suggest that complete rescue is impossible as long as protagonists and Magical Lesbians themselves are enmeshed within the linear matrix of gender, race, ethnicity, time, and sexuality.

While I realize the term Magical Lesbian is problematic, I use it to distinguish this particular type of lesbian representation that is centered on caring. Furthermore, referencing and disidentify with the “magic Negro” trope is important for this project, as

Magical Lesbians perform racial work in these texts (Glenn & Cunningham 137). Spanning back two hundred years, magic Negroes in literature (and later film) are secondary African American characters whose primary role in narratives is to rescue white protagonists. In my introduction, I explain I chose to use the problematic term lesbian to describe this trope because the term "queer" can elide women's presence (Allen 225). I view my use of the term "lesbian" as a disidentification: I use a troubled term to investigate relationship between women's same sex attractions with feminized, raced, and classed carework. Furthermore, my disidentification with the term lesbian turns an expected social performance around, as Magical Lesbians in the texts I study support heterosexuality, even as they disrupt it. However, the terms "lesbian" and "negro" have different valences and histories. While both were applied to minority groups by majority groups, and minority groups reclaimed both, "negro" also performs the rhetorical work of justifying white supremacy while "lesbian" functions to reify heteronormativity. Many theorists note, such as Siobhan Somerville that the systems of racial and sexual oppression work in tandem with one another, and emerge from the same oppressive epistemologies, yet they are different (9). The film industry's use of magic Negroes has become so common that a disidentificatory discourse about these characters has emerged in television. In particular, in the serial "Community" a central character explains to a Black woman that because he grew up watching so many movies, he expects her to solve his problems and everyone else's. There is also a body of scholarship on Black representation in film, television, and literature that speaks back to the magic Negro trope.⁷⁴

⁷⁴ Toni Morrison refers to this as "Africanism" which she describes as "a disabling virus within literary discourse, Africanism has become, in the Eurocentric tradition that American education favors, both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of

While Magical Lesbians have many disruptive aspects, their roles in plots are to rescue or attempt to rescue women protagonists who are being abused by men by engaging in feminized caretaking such cooking, cleaning, and childcare. In doing so, Magical Lesbians shift temporality in these narratives by containing, re-reading, and remaking memories. They challenge heteronormative, Western kinship and use disidentification as a destabilizing strategy. In their roles as substitute and adoptive mothers, Magical Lesbians challenge both straight and lesbian conceptions of motherhood. They destabilize biological kinship norms with motherhood, as the Magical Lesbians in these texts are portrayed as more adherent to 20th century mothering norms, such as putting children's needs above one's own. Magical Lesbians present mothering as a behavior rather than biological destiny and in doing so, destabilize the link between gender, heterosexuality, and motherhood. As I have shown in my analysis of the three novels, mothering shifts from gendered identity to praxis when authors represent biological mothers as choosing romantic relationships over childcare. Aunt Raylene steps in to mother Bone, just as Aunt May adopts Riel. Authors represent heterosexuality in these cases as a less than ideal place for childrearing - what ends up mattering is the act of caring coming from lesbian aunts.

In terms of temporality, Magical Lesbians function in a number of interesting ways that intervene with existing theories of queer temporality. Queer theorists such as Jack Halberstam, José Esteban Muñoz, and Lee Edelman argue that queer temporality redeems the present by rewriting the future, but Magical Lesbians aid protagonists through remembering the past. They “queer” the past by offering protagonists a means to live

class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power" (7). bell hooks' refers to lesbianism in European films such as *Mona Lisa* as leading to caretaking rather than erotic fulfillment, demonstrating ways blackness becomes subjugated to white needs (Black Looks 74).

beside past traumas while they offer an escape from social alienation. I refer to Sedgwick's concept of *beside* here as a mode of analysis that neither rejects nor embraces binaries, thus forming another binary, but instead acknowledges a space outside of binaries in which they are contained (8). As they queer the past, Magical Lesbians fulfill protagonists' desires to connect with family and ethnic roots. All three protagonists: Celie from *The Color Purple*, Bone from *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and Riel from *Shadow Tag* have experienced trauma and long for relationships that are out of their reach.

For example, while Celie's stepfather and husband have sexually abused her, Shug heals Celie through companionship and sex while she reconnects Celie to her sister. Because of Shug, Celie claims a new family, becomes recognized and respected by her community, and opens her own business. In *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Bone wants to know what it means to be a Boatwright woman and it is Raylene who carries knowledge of Bone's ethnic and racial past explains who this is in terms of ethnicity (206). Allison thus demonstrates white ethnicity as intersectional with class, region, and gender. Raylene provides Bone a safe space, her home, to physically and psychologically recover from her rape and for self-discovery (309). Finally, in *Shadow Tag* Riel wants to know herself as an Indian and May is the one who fulfills this desire by bring Riel to pow-wows and adopting her into an extended Indian family. Like Raylene, May's home provides Riel the physical space to exist with the trauma of watching both her parents drown. Lesbian sexual desire in these texts becomes about fulfilling other women's desires for family, connection, and safety.

Magical Lesbians show that theories of queer futurity must account for feminized caretaking. To do so means to recognize feminine caretaking norms as a link between

queer futurity and reproductive futurity. I said in my introduction that this study answers Manalansan's call to "expand our idea of 'care work' " (7). While feminine caretaking in the home (both paid and unpaid) facilitates economic productivity on a broad scale, actual carework is cyclical and repetitive. It is not linear because caring is never done. And though Magical Lesbians in these texts do not challenge cultural norms that make women primarily responsible for caregiving, the very existence of this trope challenges normative distributions of care within heterosexual family units. Magical Lesbians suggest that gendered expectations of care are too much for any one woman. However, it is important not to idealize lesbian relationships and lesbianism as a solution to the problem of heterosexual caring expectations. In each text, protagonists and other secondary characters envision lesbianism as the solution to feminine expectations. Celie thinks that Shug has escaped gender norms because Shug performs masculinity at times, yet Shug reveals she has a deep desire for the legitimization of heterosexual marriage. Raylene's sister, Ruth, imagines that Raylene is utterly content being alone, yet Raylene reveals to Bone how sorry she is that she lost her female lover. Irene from *Shadow Tag* constantly describes May as "stable," but stability is what Irene herself longs for. I bring up these examples to remind the reader that while Magical Lesbians in novels may solve problems, the trope also troubles itself.

For example, in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Shug functions as both a Magical Lesbian and magic Negro as she sweeps into the text to rescue protagonist Celie. As a magic Negro, Shug solves Celie's biggest problems (being beaten by her husband and disconnect from her sister) but Shug disidentifies with the magic Negro trope as she seeks out her own pleasure and meaning in life, instead of living only for Celie. James Baldwin once argued

that there was a “a price of the ticket” for African American representation in literature (x); I found that in *The Color Purple*, the price of that ticket for African American representations of lesbian desire is to present that desire as supportive of heterosexual families and relationships. While *The Color Purple* contained more lesbian eroticism than any other text in this project, Walker writes the one erotic scene in the text using metaphors of mothering. Celie compares Shug’s mouth on her breast to nursing a child, and during sex says she “act like a little lost baby”; these metaphors laid the groundwork for lesbian secondary characters in future texts that become substitute mothers. As eroticism in *The Color Purple* is described in terms of a mother/child relationship, it sets the stage for Magical Lesbian sexual desire to transform into a desire to mother. Interestingly, this scenario mimics psychoanalytic theory that suggests that heterosexual women sublimate their sexual desire into motherhood.⁷⁵

We see this the conflict of lesbian sexual desire and gendered caring expectations in Dorothy Allison’s *Bastard Out of Carolina*. Aunt Raylene, the Magical Lesbian, has lost the love of her life over mothering, as she asked her lover to choose between her and her child. Raylene never explains why she asked that, only that it was a request that should have never been made (300). Yet Shug has been forced to give up her children by her mother because of her sexual desire, which again, suggests women’s sexual desire is not compatible with child rearing. Instead of lesbian desire, in *Bastard Out of Carolina*, we see Aunt Raylene engage in feminine caretaking and disidentify with feminine gender norms by consciously selecting which types of femininity to embody. Raylene provides competent caretaking for her nieces and nephews and in doing so, becomes needed by the Boatwright

⁷⁵ See Freud, “New Introductory Lectures” v. 22, p128.

family. Unlike the reciprocal care in *The Color Purple*, the care Aunt Raylene provides is completely free, as the extended family does not reciprocate Raylene's labor. It is Aunt Raylene's queerness -- she has no nuclear family unit -- which allows her to be available to care take. Raylene's lack of a lover and few friends also make her available to the extended family. Thus Raylene's character demonstrates lesbian caring (but not lesbian desire) as intertwined with reproductive futurity. However, lesbian caring presents us with representations of reproductive and queer futurity that occur simultaneously with one another rather than in opposition to each other.

In Louise Erdrich's *Shadow Tag*, a lesbian relationship is presented as an ideal situation for child rearing, as Magical Lesbian May not only cares for her half-sister's children, but also connects them to their Native ethnic identities. May is in a long-term lesbian relationship, raising seven children, but she is not once shown ever touching her partner. May often provides physical comfort to her sister, but her hands-off relationship with her partner, Bobbi, suggests a domesticated lesbianism. However, May takes the relationship between lesbian caring and reproductive futurity further by queering mothering and demonstrating a model of mothering that is detached and in dialogue with heteronormative models. In other words, May models dialogic mothering that challenges both heteronormative and lesbian models of mothering. Rather than an identity, dialogic mothering is a set of behaviors that are flexible and situationally dependent. Yet throughout these three texts, I see a progression of lesbian dialogic mothering becoming a substitute for lesbian eroticism.

Through this study I've used explorations of hetero-sexualized feminine caring norms to explore Magical Lesbian representation. These secondary lesbian characters have

engaged in what I refer to as *reparative* caretaking. When I say reparative, I refer to the multiple roles lesbian caretaking plays in these texts as Magical Lesbians repair both individual protagonists' lives and protagonists' relationships to institutions. Magical Lesbians caretake in the individual sphere by rescuing women and children from abuse, confronting abusive men, and assisting women in trauma recovery yet in doing so Magical Lesbians also repair protagonist's relationship to institutions such as the heterosexual family, straight time, and femininity. While Magical Lesbians disrupt these constructs by exposing them *as constructed*, rather than natural, they do not dismantle the constructs themselves – rather they offer a new way to relate to these constructs. Does the recurrent pairing of abusive or absent men with reparative lesbian caretaking transgress other contemporary representations of heterosexual families? When lesbian characters are offered as a solution to heterosexual abuse, does it shift our gaze to ways nuclear families breed domestic violence? Or do these texts suggesting that lesbian caring is a queer solution to the problem of wife and child abuse? In the background of this question is the turn in lesbian theory towards thinking about the relationship between lesbianism and sexual abuse. Both Anne Cvetkovich and Dorothy Allison reference the correlation of lesbianism with childhood sexual abuse and the taboo of discussing them together. While neither argues for a causal link between sexuality and sexual abuse, both Allison and Cvetkovich note a remarkable refusal to consider the relationship between lesbianism and abuse (Cvetkovich 90). Cvetkovich notes, “even if lesbianism isn’t caused by incest, it certainly has a prominent place in the therapeutic cultures that address the problems of sexual abuse” (91). While I do not take on this question directly in my study, I bring it up here to point out that Magical Lesbians can be used to elide the correlation between

lesbianism and childhood sexual abuse. Their caring is perhaps a way to clean up the theoretical messes investigating this connection might cause. Magical Lesbians function in a reparative manner when it comes to childhood abuse, while avoiding the question of the interaction between abuse and sexuality. Shug, Raylene, and May all care for protagonists coping with abuse, and Shug and Raylene both have wounds from past relationships, none of the Magical Lesbian characters ever reveal sexual abuse in their pasts.

While it may appear that Magical Lesbians in these texts represent yet another way queer representation has been absorbed into the neo-liberal movement towards sameness, Magical Lesbians are more disruptive to normative sexuality and temporality than they appear to be. Queer theorists such as Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, argue that mothering and child rearing represent both normative sexuality and temporality, yet the lesbian representations explored here tell a different story. For one, they suggest that reproductive futurity has already been queered by lesbian labor, a hypothesis I find supported in evolutionary anthropology (Kirkpatrick 393). Secondly, Magical Lesbians offer a new way to think about mothering, one that shifts conceptions of mothering from both straight and lesbian perspectives. They build upon Judith Roof's argument that mothering can be viewed as a series of actions rather than a biological, gendered impetus (162).

Directions for Future Research

Magical Lesbians characters can be found in numerous other mass media and popular culture outlets.⁷⁶ Various contemporary television shows contain Magical Lesbians,

⁷⁶ See Vi from Wally Lamb's *We Are Water* (2013); Betty from the television series *Bomb Girls* (2012 – 2013), Crazy Eyes from the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black* (2013 – 2014); Vanessa from Jodi Picoult's *Sing You Home* (2011); Blu Rain from Sapphire's *Push*

and it is important to see how images of lesbianism shift and add broader, publically circulated discussions about feminized caretaking and queer temporality. Increased queer representation has also resulted in Magical Lesbian characters appearing in mass marketed fiction, and though it is not clear as to the extent that these lesbian characters perhaps utilize “queer” temporality in their rescuing, they do engage in feminized caretaking. Furthermore, I think it is important to explore non-cis gendered (that is representation of feminized caretaking coming from bodies that may not be female) representations of feminized caretaking and rescuing. For example, drag is a locale of feminized emotional caretaking coming from male bodies. In movies, trans* women characters appear in similar roles to Magical Lesbians – rescue through caretaking.

Issues of Form

A sub-theme running through this dissertation has been the interaction of the novel form with women writers and representations of lesbianism. In the literature review for each chapter, I note how some critics argue that *The Color Purple*, *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and *Shadow Tag* are not actually novels. These critiques say less about the texts themselves than they do about the broader cultural binaries haunting Western art. In particular, I think of the arbitrary divisions between “folk art” and “fine art,” which seem to be more about the social class, gender, and race of who is making the art than the art work itself. After all, if Marcel Duchamp can cause paradigm shifts in the art world with his “readymades,” then why are quilts designated folk art? Bakhtin notes that the family novel brought about a

(1996) and in the film version *Precious* (2009); Emily from *Pretty Little Liars* (2010 – present); Ali Gilchrist from Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Talents* (1998); Idgie Threadgood from Fannie Flagg's *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe* (1987).

shift from folk time to genealogical linear time (231). Both Alice Walker and Louise Erdrich have been accused of writing “fairy tales.”⁷⁷ I use the verb accuse deliberately here, as for both Erdrich and Walker the term “fairy tale” is evoked as an insult and to suggest that they are literary imposters who do not follow the rules of the novel form. In other words, there is a significant undercurrent in the criticism of Walker, Erdrich, and Allison that claims they do not write novels, suggesting that it is the author who determines the genre of the work rather than the text.

I began this project with the certainty that I would be exploring ways lesbian characters were being used by heterosexuality and that mass mediated genres had digested the radical potential of lesbian characters into palatable women who cooked and cleaned and babysat. While I certainly did find this to be the case, it is only one part of a much bigger story about temporality, trauma, and caring. It is interesting in a time when there are so very few archives dedicated to lesbian culture that Magical Lesbians perform archival work in these texts. Their work as minor characters is more than a holding place for the “perverse” (the out of center and deviant) in narratives (Roof, “Sidekicks” 6). Magical Lesbians are an archive for trauma and for connection. In particular, the characters I’ve examined all hold connections to race and ethnicity for central characters. Both Shug and May offer a spiritual un-whitewashing for central narrators. Shug shows Celie how to stop worshipping a white God and a white Jesus, while May provides Riel with the spiritual

⁷⁷ Furthermore, the critics making these claims are misusing the term fairy tale. In their anthology *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms* (2012), Kay Turner and Pauline Greenhill note that fairy tales “feature human and non-human principal characters in developed fictional narratives, along with elements of wonder and the supernatural” (3). Interestingly, they argue that fairy tales are a queer genre noting that the “fairy tale’s deep structure, represented by the realm of enchantment, is antimoralistic, agency oriented, and gender/sexuality expressive in terms that challenge normality” (6).

and cultural practices that will allow her to be Indian instead of white. Thus Magical Lesbians navigate the arena between the body and the abstract spiritual realms and reveal ways race and ethnicity are archival: they both inscribe histories and futures onto the body. They also suggest that while heterosexual systems may produce intra-familial trauma, heterosexuality alone cannot provide the means to cope with trauma. Perhaps there is a subtle argument in these texts that women's trauma requires queer care.

Furthermore, these characters add to the ongoing critical discussions about trauma and temporality by bringing caring to the forefront of the conversation. Like Magical Lesbians, carework has an odd relationship to broader structures of the family and economy. It is necessary work to support heteronormative and capitalist economies, yet it is devalued. Carework's cyclical, never ending nature undermines linear, production oriented models of time, even as family and economic systems rely on this labor being performed by women to function. Magical Lesbian caring brings the connection of caring to temporality to the forefront and it also tells us that the boundary between queer temporality and straight temporality is messy. In the middle of *Bastard Out of Carolina*, Anney, Raylene's sister, is criticizing her for not giving birth to any children. Raylene replies with "an't nobody in this family ever been selfish with their children. Why, I've got up many a morning to find a porch full of young-uns somebody's dropped off in the night" (189). While this quote evokes dialogic, situational mothering, I read it as also representative of the permeable boundary between queer time and straight time. Raylene's hyperbole of waking up to find children dropped off while she was sleeping suggests that moving between these temporalities happens at night, in darkness, while one is unconscious. The children appear and Raylene's caring begins. The porch itself is a

borderland – neither completely inside nor completely outside. The discipline that maintains these boundaries between straight and queer temporalities appears to be running on straight time, as it is the straight parents who are dropping off their children in the night. But who crosses these boundaries? Children and Magical Lesbians. Who needs queer temporalities? Straight families or queers? These three texts all suggest that while straight time is dangerous for women and queer temporality is palliative but neither temporality solves the problem. Thus queer temporality does not offer an escape from straight time, but instead works in tandem with it. In these texts children and women are rescued from abuse without state intervention. Queer care acts in place of state care, yet queer care does not challenge the structures that create and sustain abuse. As Aunt Raylene's home is where the children in *Bastard Out of Carolina* go to temporarily escape social norms and feminized labor (and in Bone's case permanently escape abuse), queer caring offers us knowledge about the disciplines that maintain the boundary between queer temporality in straight time. All three Magical Lesbians reveal this boundary to be a liminal space, a twilight, a between which cannot be fully contained. Aunt Raylene has her porch, Shug travels to perform, and May has a home with filled with fluid kinships. It is feminized caring which crosses these boundaries, linking lesbian caretaking with straight reproduction. Magical Lesbians respond to troubled times by troubling time, and, in doing so, trouble every notion of temporality that is typically presumed. As I have argued in this study Magical Lesbians queer care through gender performance, temporality, and queer mothering. They offer us a means to think together queer futurity and reproductive futurity and in doing so widen queer temporality.

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